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# BLOOD AND LIFE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

CHARLES OWIREDU

Thesis Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
(Ph.D.)

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Department of Theology  
University of Durham



20 APR 2005

Submitted in December 2004

## Abstract

### **Blood and Life in the Old Testament**

Charles Owiredù

Ph.D. Thesis Submitted to the University of Durham, December 2004

The primary objective of this thesis is to present an integrated interpretation of the significance of blood in Israelite thought, based around Lev 17:10-14, which states that blood is the life of every creature. Previous works on OT blood ritual have given very little attention to the wider symbolic context. The question of Lev 17:11 can be better understood when we have explored the OT and the Israelite/Judahite concept of life and death in terms of the presence of fluid in the body, and the manipulation of blood on behalf of a person. It will become evident that in order to fully appreciate the significance of blood in the OT, blood must be seen not only in its own right (Lev 17:10-14), but also in relation to the general role of fluids within the life of the body.

The first chapter looks at the place of blood in OT physiology, and at aspects of its cultural significance. The subsequent two chapters consider fluids in general, and their significance for ideas of death in literary and mortuary contexts. Chapters four and five will then show how the understanding of blood as life can throw light on the ritual use of blood in reversing the dead condition of the "leper" and the corpse-contaminated person and on the narratives apparently featuring a protective use of blood in Exodus. Chapter six comprises a short summary and a discussion of some broader implications. These include remarks on the dietary prohibition in Leviticus, and on the significance of this research for an understanding of the role of blood in Temple sacrifice.

The chapters draw on a variety of methods, including textual analysis and on a symbolic analysis derived from social anthropology. Their main purpose is to indicate that life is, in some physical sense, located in blood and is associated with body fluids. Literary and archaeological evidence will also be invoked to show that blood and other liquid substances may also have been thought capable of postponing or even reversing the dying process.

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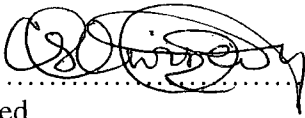
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## Declaration

This work has been submitted to the University of Durham in accordance with the regulations for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It is my own work, and none of it has been previously submitted to the University of Durham or in any other university for a degree.

Charles Owiredu

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Owiredu', written over a horizontal dotted line.

Signed

March 1, 2005

Date:

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I dedicate this work to my daughters Jessica, Nhyira and Adom, and my son Kojo.

Charles Owiredu,  
December, 2004

## List of Abbreviations

### I. Periodicals, Reference Works, Serials

<i>AB</i>	<i>The Anchor Bible</i>
<i>ABD</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
<i>AOAT</i>	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
<i>APOT</i>	<i>The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament</i> , 2 vols., ed. R. H. Charles. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913.
<i>ARW</i>	Archiv für Religionswissenschaft
<i>ASORDS</i>	American Schools of Oriental Research Dissertation Series
'Aticot	Atiqot / English series: journal of the Israel Department of Antiquities, Jerusalem 1955-1990
<i>AfO</i>	<i>Archiv für Orientforschung</i>
<i>AncIsr</i>	R. de Vaux, 1961. <i>Ancient Israel: Its life and Institutions</i> . Trans. J. McHugh. London. Repr. New York, 1965
<i>ANE</i>	Ancient Near East(ern)
<i>ANET</i>	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> , 3d ed. With suppl., ed. J. B. Pritchard, Princeton, 1969
<i>AV</i>	Authorized Version
<i>BA</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
<i>BASOR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
<i>BC</i>	Biblical Commentary, ed. C. F Keil and F. Delitzsch. Edinburgh
<i>BDB</i>	F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs. 1907. <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980.
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i> , Rome
<i>BZAW</i>	Beihefte zur ZAW
<i>CAD</i>	Ignace I. Gelb <i>et al.</i> (eds.), <i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i> (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1964-)
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i> , Washington, 1939-
<i>CHD</i>	Chicago Hittite Dictionary
<i>CSCO</i>	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Louvain, 1903-
<i>DB</i>	Dictionary of the Bible, edited by F.C. Grant and H. Rowley, 2 <sup>nd</sup> ed Edinburgh, 1963.

# Abbreviations

<i>EJ</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i> , 10 vols., ed. J. Klutzhkin and I Elbogen. Berlin, 1928-34
<i>EncJud</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i> (1971)
<i>EncRel</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Religion</i> , 16 vols., ed. M. Eliade. New York, 1987
<i>ERE</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics</i> , James Hastings, ed. Edinburgh-New York, 1955. 13 vols. 1st impression 1908-22
<i>ExpTim</i>	Expository Times, Surrey
<i>EvQ</i>	Evangelical Quarterly
<i>HALOT</i>	Koehler, L., W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm, (eds.), Hebraische und aramaisches Lexicon zum Alten Testament (KB) (3rd ed., Brill, 1967-1990). English translation: <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Tr. and ed. under the supervision of M.E. J. Richardson. 5 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994-2000.
<i>HCOT</i>	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>HSM</i>	Harvard Semitic Monographs
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i> , Cincinnati
<i>IB</i>	<i>Interpreter's Bible</i>
<i>IBC</i>	Interpretations: A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991.
<i>IDB</i>	Buttrick, George A., ed. <i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> . 4 vols. New York: Abingdon, 1962.
<i>Il.</i>	<i>Iliad</i>
<i>Iraq</i>	<i>Iraq</i>
<i>ISBE</i>	Bromiley, G. W., ed. International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. 4 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979-1988.
<i>JANES</i>	<i>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University</i> , New York
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JEnc</i>	<i>The Jewish Encyclopaedia</i> , 12 vols., ed. Isidore Singer et al. New York, 1901-6
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JNSL</i>	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i> , Stellenbosch
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i> , Leiden
<i>JPS</i>	Jewish Publication Society
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JBQ</i>	<i>Jewish Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i> , Sheffield
<i>JSOTSup</i>	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
<i>JTS</i>	Journal of Theological Studies, Oxford
<i>JW</i>	Josephus, <i>The Jewish War</i> (=Bellum Judaicum)

# Abbreviations

KAI	<i>Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften</i> , 3 vols., ed. H. Donner and W. Röllig, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1962
KJV	King James Version (English)
KUB	Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Vorderasiatische Abteilung (later Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft) <i>Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi</i> , 1921 –
KTU	<i>Keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit</i> , vol. 1, ed. M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín. AOAT 24. Kevelaer and Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1976
LB	Late Bronze (Age)
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
MTZ	<i>Münchener theologische Zeitschrift</i>
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIV	New International Bible
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
OTL	Old Testament Library
PI	J. Pedersen. 1926-40. <i>Israel: Its Life and Culture</i> . 4 vols. in 2.. London: Oxford, 1926-40).
RB	<i>Revue Biblique</i> , Paris
RelS	<i>Religious Studies</i> , London
RLA	<i>Reallexicon der Assyriologie</i> , ed. G. Eberling et al. Berlin 1932-
RS	<i>Ras Shamra</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version (English)
SBLSP	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers</i>
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
SJOT	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
Syr	<i>Syria: Revue d'Art Oriental et d'Archéologie</i> , Institut Français d'Archéologie de Beyrouth, Paris: Geuthner
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> , ed. G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and H. J. Fabry. (tr. J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley and D. E. Green). Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1974 –
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentary
Ta	<i>Tarbiz</i>
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentary
TynBul	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
UF	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
UT	Gordon, Cyrus H. <i>Ugaritic Textbook</i> . Revised reprint. <i>Analecta orientalia</i> 38. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1998.
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i> , Leiden
WBC	<i>Word Biblical Commentary</i>
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament



*Abbreviations*

ZAW                      *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*,  
Berlin

## II. Pseudepigrapha, Qumran, Rabbinic Writings

<i>Jub</i>	<i>Jubilees</i>
<i>Pss. Sol.</i>	Psalms of Solomon
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls
QL	Qumran Literature
1QH	<i>Hôdyôt (Thanksgiving Hymns)</i> from Qumran Cave 1
Tal. Bab.	Babylonian Talmud
<i>Ber.</i>	<i>Berakot</i> (Mishnah)
<i>Gen. R.</i>	<i>Vayyiqra Midrash (Midrash Rabbah on Leviticus)</i> [Preferably <i>Ber. R.</i> ]
<i>Lev. R.</i>	<i>Bereshith Midrash (Midrash Rabbah on Genesis)</i> [Preferably <i>Vay. R.</i> ]
<i>Mek.</i>	<i>Mekilta deRabbi Ishmael</i>
<i>M</i>	<i>Mishnah</i>
<i>M. Qat.</i>	<i>Mo'ed Qatan</i>
<i>Neg.</i>	<i>Nega'im</i> (Tohorot, vol. 1) leprosy signs
<i>Nid.</i>	<i>Niddah</i>
<i>Pe'ah</i>	<i>Pe'ah</i>
<i>Pes.</i>	<i>Pesahim</i> (Talmudic Tractate)
<i>R</i>	<i>Rabbah</i>
<i>Shab.</i>	<i>Sabbat</i> (Talmudic Tractate)
<i>Sem.</i>	<i>Semaḥot</i>
<i>Targ. Onq.</i>	<i>Targum Onqelos</i>
<i>Targ. Ps.-J.</i>	<i>Targum Pseudo-Jonathan</i>

## III. Philo and Josephus

<i>AgAp</i>	Josephus, <i>Against Apion</i> (= <i>Contra Apionem</i> )
<i>Ant</i>	Josephus, <i>Jewish Antiquities</i> (= <i>Antiquitates Judaicae</i> )

# Transliteration of Hebrew

CONSONANTS		VOWELS	
<i>Hebrew Consonant</i>	<i>Transliteration</i>	<i>*Hebrew Vowel</i>	<i>Transliteration</i>
א	ʾ	X̄	a
ב	b		
בּ	bh	X̄ <sub>h</sub>	ā
ג	g		
גּ	gh	X̄ <sub>h</sub>	e
ד	d		
		X̄ <sub>h</sub>	e
ה	h		
ו	v	X̄ <sub>h</sub>	e
ז	z		
הּ	h̄	X̄ <sub>h</sub>	e
ט	ṭ		
י	y	X̄ <sub>h</sub>	e
כּ	k		
כַּח	kh	X̄ <sub>h</sub>	i
ל	l		
מ	m	X̄	o
נ	n		
ס	s	ʾX̄	ô
ע	ʿ		
פּ	p	X̄ <sub>h</sub>	u
פַּח	ph		
צ	ṣ	ʾX̄	û
ק	q		
ר	r		
שׁ	ś	ʾX̄ <sub>h</sub>	ai
שׁ	ś/ sh		
ת	t		

\* X is any given Hebrew consonant

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction: The Conceptualisation of Blood in the Old Testament

#### Introduction

It is the purpose of this study to present an integrated interpretation of blood's significance in Israelite thought, based around the explicit statements in Lev 17:10-14, that blood is the life of every creature:

And anyone from the house of Israel, or from the strangers who sojourn among you, who eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your lives; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement. Therefore I said to the Israelites, 'No person among you may eat blood, nor may any stranger who sojourns among you eat blood. So when any man from the Israelites, or from the strangers who sojourn among you, who hunts and catches a beast or a bird that may be eaten, he must pour out its blood and cover it with dust. For it is the life of all flesh, its blood for its life. Therefore I said to the Israelites, 'You must not eat the blood of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is its blood; whoever eats it will be cut off'.

It is my contention that the OT passages on blood sacrifice must be read within the context of the life-giving role of fluids as a broader category in Hebrew thought. This approach will also provide an opportunity to look afresh at some of the more established issues of blood sacrifice. Previous works on sacrifices have given very little attention to this wider symbolic context. It is my conviction, for example, that the question of Lev 17:11 can be better understood when we have explored the OT and the Israelite/Judahite concept of life and death in terms of the presence of fluid in the body, and the manipulation of blood on behalf of a person. So it is that we raise questions on the function of fluids in general and blood in particular in terms of the life of the body. We explore the Hebrew understanding of death in relation to dryness



and ask how the idea of moisture as life informs Israelite blood ritual. In other words, in order to fully appreciate the significance of blood in the OT, blood must be seen not only in its own right (Lev 17:10-14), but also in a broader context as part of the general role of fluids in relation to the life of the body.

Accordingly, this first chapter will look at the place of blood in OT physiology, and at aspects of its cultural significance. The subsequent two chapters consider fluids in general, and their significance for ideas of death in literary and mortuary contexts. These chapters draw on a variety of methods and information, but their main purpose is simple and straightforward; viz., to indicate that life is, in some physical sense, located in blood and is associated with body fluids, demonstrating that the transition to death is marked by the loss of such fluids. Some literary and archaeological evidence will also be adduced to show that blood and other liquid substances may also have been thought to be capable of ameliorating or even partially reversing the state of death. Chapters four and five will then show how the understanding of blood as life can throw light on the ritual use of blood in reversing the dead condition of the "leper" and the corpse-contaminated person and on the narratives apparently featuring a protective use of blood in Exodus.

Finally, after a short summary, some of the broader implications will be drawn out in the conclusion. These include some remarks on the dietary prohibition in Leviticus, but more importantly on the significance of this research for an understanding of blood's role in Temple sacrifice. A full account of sacrifice is, obviously, beyond the scope of this dissertation, but the theories proposed by Jacob Milgrom have lent new importance to the use of blood in the Temple. We shall look briefly, therefore, at the extent to which Milgrom's ideas are compatible with the understanding of blood put forward in our preceding chapters, and ask how far this understanding requires a new approach to aspects of the sacrificial system.

The theoretical perspectives of this thesis draw on forms of textual analysis and on a symbolic analysis derived from social anthropology. The principal purpose of this chapter is, now, to offer a preliminary outline of the ways in which blood was understood to be important by the OT writers, both physiologically as a defining component of biological life, and symbolically as a ritual aspect of cultural existence. These two aspects of blood will be addressed in a more detailed way in later chapters

with specific reference to particular practices. Here we begin with physical understandings of blood in relation to life and moving on to the nature of blood symbolism within the wider social and ritual context of Israel.

As a background thought, we note that the role of the blood in keeping the body alive through the circulatory system was unknown in the ancient world, and that this great discovery of the seventeenth century produced a radical revolution not only in the development of medical science,<sup>1</sup> but also in our perceptions: so much has the medical understanding of blood and other fluids in the body influenced our lives that in the modern world it is not easy to think of blood apart from the context of arteries, veins and the distribution of oxygen.<sup>2</sup> Even so, many people do respond to blood in ways that are prompted by cultural factors other than anatomical understanding. So it is that, in the world after Harvey, just as in the ancient world, ideas about blood are not constrained simply by medical science, but by wider social and cultural factors taking us beyond physiology, factors grounded in the ways different cultures classify their worlds.

Indeed, from an anthropological perspective, we can view any culture in terms of a set of ordered categories and ordering mechanisms maintaining the world or reorganizing it when it becomes disordered. This is the case, for example, with the purity laws and sacrificial system outlined in the OT in which blood plays a notable part. As will become clear, however, the challenge that faces us is to discern the extent to which quasi-scientific understanding of the blood's physical characteristics

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<sup>1</sup> The function of blood became more clearly understood when its circulation was demonstrated by Harvey's theory of blood circulation published in Frankfurt in 1628 under the title *Exercitatio Anatomica de Motu Cordis et Sanguinis in Animalibus*. For detailed information see M. Foster, *Lectures on the History of Physiology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1901), p. 47; Erwin H. Ackerknecht, *A short History of Medicine* (Baltimore: The John Hopkin's University Press, 1982), p. 114; Roger French, *William Harvey's Natural Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 302-303; Roy Porter, ed., *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Medicine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 159; M. Foster, *Lectures on the History of Physiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1901), p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> Modern studies in anatomy and physiology point out that without blood circulation the human body would stop working. Blood essentially forms about 8% of the human body weight; the remaining 92% is made up of other fluids and tissues. The heart, the lungs, and the blood vessels work together to form the circular structure of the system, with the heart pumping some about 1,200 gallons (4,730 litres) of blood daily. G. J. Tortora and S. R. Grabowski, *Principles of Anatomy and Physiology*. 7th ed. (New York: Harper Collins College Publishers, 1993), p. 568; Ruth D. Bruun and Bethel Bruun, *The Human Body* (New York: Random House, 1982), p. 59.

and properties and wider sets of symbolic associations are related and may be interpreted.

By gaining some understanding of how blood is reckoned to function in more general life contexts we shall be well placed to assess its role within the more specific domain of, for example, sacrifice, and the nature of the Temple rites in Israel. Accordingly, this chapter begins not only by examining the place of blood in Israelite thinking but also of other body fluids in order to establish something of their symbolic inter-relationship. This description is firmly influenced by the OT claim that “the life of the flesh is in the blood” and is similar to what we would now interpret as both a physiological and anthropological perspective.

## II. Hebrew Physiology of Life and Death

In order to understand the Hebrew concept of blood in relation to life, one must first understand the Hebrew ideas about certain prominent parts of the human body that are conceived as representing the overall life of the body.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, we set out to construct a kind of cultural classification of the Hebrew “body” and its “life”. People who possess beliefs regarding the impurity of the dead human body and who are required to keep laws prohibiting contact with the corpse cannot easily acquire anatomical knowledge. Unlike the Egyptians who practised embalming and mummification, it was prohibited for the Hebrew to touch the dead body and whoever touched the corpse became unclean and had to submit to rituals of purification. The fear of corpse-contamination presumably led to abstention from the deliberate dissection of the human body. Hebrew human anatomy was therefore basically one of external observation of the human body, though doubtlessly complemented by some knowledge gleaned from observation of the internal anatomy of the animals slaughtered for food or sacrifice. From this the Hebrews could have made assumptions about human anatomy on the basis of comparison. Indeed, the OT

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<sup>3</sup> My source for the study of the ancient Israelite conceptions of the life of the physical body is, obviously, textual evidence from the OT. We may describe the OT as the canonized document of the official Hebrew religion of Yahweh. Thus one may reconstruct from the OT a picture of the religious conception of certain vital parts of the body and, for the purpose of this section of our study, a somewhat partial picture of ancient Israelite understanding of blood as a “bearer of life”.

expresses knowledge of the viscera, specifically making mention of the heart, the liver, the kidney, and the stomach. There are, by contrast, no references to the lungs, the spleen or the brain, which feature prominently in modern medicine.

### (1) Some Prominent Parts of the Body in the OT

It is evident, as one would anticipate, that the ancient Israelites did not have a concept of the human body as we do today. Indeed, it is often pointed out that there is no precise Hebrew term for the body,<sup>4</sup> and it is the term **בשר**, designating just “flesh” that we usually translate as “body”.<sup>5</sup> They therefore did not view the body from separate physiological and psychical perspectives. H.W. Robinson comments, “Psychical and ethical functions are considered to be just as appropriate to the bodily organs as the physiological....”<sup>6</sup> They described the human being with such expressions as “flesh and blood,” and “flesh and bone.” However they still conceived the whole person as **נפש**, presumably, because the presence of the **נפש**, in its various vital designations (breath, blood and soul) in the body, made the whole person a “**נפש**-thing”.

An Israelite or a Jew reading the **נפש** passages in the OT will, obviously, not encounter the ambiguities and confusion of mind with which a non-Hebrew speaker grapples. The range of meanings given to the term **נפש** expresses the psychophysical unity of the person.<sup>7</sup> Basically it can be understood as the “principle of life”, the

<sup>4</sup> J. C. Lambert in his article “Body” suggests that there is no proper term in Hebrew for “body” because with their psycho-physical ideas of personality the Hebrews did not feel the need for a special word to denote the bodily organism considered by itself. See J. C. Lambert, ‘Body’ in *ERE*, 2.760. Robinson wrote, “[T]hough there are about eighty parts of the body named in the OT, there is no word for the whole.” See John A. T. Robinson, *The Body: A Study of Pauline Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1966; first published 1952), p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> The idea of duality in human personality is paramount in the NT where the body is denoted as *σῶμα*. This specific term *σῶμα*, for the body, is synonymous with *σὰρξ*, the usual term for flesh especially found in Pauline anthropology (I Cor 5:3; Col 2:5; 2 Cor 4:10, 11).

<sup>6</sup> H. Wheeler Robinson, ‘Hebrew Psychology’, in Arthur S. Peake (ed.), *The People of the Book* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), p. 353.

<sup>7</sup> The meaning of the verb **נפש** is basically, “to breathe”, “to take breath”, “to refresh oneself”. There is an etymological connection of the Hebrew verb *nāphash* with Akkadian *napāshu*, “to breathe”. The noun **נפש** was viewed as a seat of the emotions. Its emotional connotations include ‘desire or craving’ (Prov 13:2, 4). The volitional connotations are expressed in the rendering of the **נפש** as “will” or “wish” (Deut 21:14, cf. Jer 34:16). Hunger and thirst were sensations attributed to the **נפש** (Num 11:6). The **נפש** was said to be distressed (Gen 42:21; Ps 31:8) or troubled (Ps 6:4; 42:6, 12; 43:5; Isa

animating force joined together with the body in a human being or an animal. Daniel Lys observes that נפש is understood on the basis of the idea of respiration.<sup>8</sup> Included in the physiological designations of the term are neck, throat, and breath,<sup>9</sup> blood and the corpse. J. Milgrom observes that since the throat contains both the oesophagus and trachea, one can readily understand that נפש denotes “appetite” and “breath, life”.<sup>10</sup> The psychological designations include the soul, the self, as well as various volitional and emotional connotations. In these terms we could say that the OT contains a physical anthropology in which the נפש is part of the constitution of the human being contrasted with the בשר, flesh, from which the נפש can be removed.

Therefore, to say “blood is נפש” is to refer to it as an individual and independent entity, which animates the body while within it, and is separated from it after death. Blood can be understood as a vehicle for the נפש, so that it can be said “the life of the flesh is in its blood” (Lev 17:11, 14).

Associated with נפש, the רוח, “spirit”, is generally translated as “breath”, “wind”, but in more psychological and theological contexts, as “spirit”.<sup>11</sup> The רוח is basically air inhaled and exhaled. The term signifies air in motion, a blowing, breeze, wind, nothingness, spirit and sense.<sup>12</sup> The ancient Hebrews knew רוח as the breath, which supports life: the life of animals (Gen 6:17; 7:15) and of humans (Gen 6:3; Job 12:10; Zech 12:1). The רוח was in a sense, “life” in the body: הרוח לכל-בשר “the

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15:4; 53:11). The נפש may be said to “waste away” (Lev 26:16 (H); Deut 28:65; 1 Sam 2:33; Ps 84:3), to faint (Ps 107:26) and drain away (Job 30:16). For a detailed discussion on the נפש, see Daniel Lys, *Nèphesh: Histoire de l'âme dans la révélation d'Israël au sien des religions proche-orientales* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959), pp. 44-45. Daniel Lys, ‘The Israelite Soul According to the LXX’, VT 16 (1966), p. 181-228. Summing up the conclusions of his study of נפש, Lys notes that even in the earliest OT texts the meanings of נפש included, life; what lives and dies; the affections, i.e., need and appetite, desire and pleasure, the feelings; several localizations (“interior”, liver, blood, breath); the animate, living being, and then the Self, I. Lys also notes that the Hebrew understanding of נפש also includes stomach or belly.

<sup>8</sup> Lys, ‘The Israelite Soul According to the LXX’, pp. 181-228.

<sup>9</sup> See Isa 32:6, 58:10; Jer 4:10, 31:14, 25; Jon 2:6; Ps 69:2; 107:9; Prov 10:3; 11:25; 13:4; 27:7; Qoh 6:2. Also the נפש as “throat” has some connection with the Akkadian *napishtu* “breath” which may also mean “throat and organs of respiration”.

<sup>10</sup> J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 3A; New York: Doubleday, 2000), p. 1472.

<sup>11</sup> R. C. Dentan, ‘Breath’ in IDB 1.465.

<sup>12</sup> L. Koehler et al., ‘רוח’ in HALOT 3.1197



breath of life in all flesh” (Num 16:22; 27:16). When God takes away the רוח, the living dies (Job 34:14-15; Ps 104:29).

Also, רוח is parallel with נפש in some contexts (Isa 26:9; Job 7:11; Ps 143:6f). What the ancient Hebrew understood about the physiology of the human body is that the presence of רוח in the body kept it alive. The loss of breath meant the loss of life. This implies a notion that the רוח in the body is its life. However, unlike נפש, it is not explicitly stated in the OT that רוח is life. Nor is it said of the נשמה that it is life.<sup>13</sup> Lys notes that two passages in the LXX translate רוח by ψυχῆ (Gen 41:8; Exod 35:21).<sup>14</sup> This implies an early understanding of a connection between the נפש and רוח.

In the OT the רוח, נפש and נשמה are all associated primarily with respiration, showing a connection between them and their various meanings including wind, soul, self and breath. In OT physiology, רוח is often associated with the nose and the mouth: רוח אפו “the breath of his nose” (Job 4:9),<sup>15</sup> רוח אפך, ‘the blast of your nostrils’ (Exod 15:8), רוח אפינו, “the breath of our nostrils” (Lam 4:20), and רוח פיו “the breath of his mouth” (Ps 33:6). The designation of the term נפש as “throat” makes significant the respiratory function of the throat in Hebrew physiology. Therefore it would be appropriate to conclude that their idea of the physical identification of the נפש might have included not only the throat or gullet but the whole respiratory tract - the air passages connecting the nasal cavity, throat, and the two bronchial passages connecting the trachea to the lungs.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> P. Maiberg, ‘*nāpah*’ in *TDOT* 9.485-488. Maiberg argues that, since in the OT view, all earthly life derives from the breath of God (cf. Isa 42:5; Job 33:4); when this breath is taken away, they die (Ps 104:29; Job 34:14f.; Isa 57:16). He adds, that breath and life (נשמה and נפש) are synonymous (cf. Josh 10: 40 with 10:35 and Job 41:13).

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Lys, *Rûach: Le Souffle dans l'Ancien Testament. Enquête Anthropologique à travers l'histoire théologique d'Israël* (Paris: Presses de Université de France, 1962), 55ff. For Lys observation that נפש is never translated *pneuma*, see Lys, ‘The Israelite Soul According to the LXX’, pp. 181-228.

<sup>15</sup> Here meaning God’s wrath.

<sup>16</sup> The trachea (windpipe) refers to the air passage from the larynx to the bronchi. The larynx is the upper part of the windpipe from which the voice sounds. The bronchi are the two tubes into which the trachea divides, opposite the upper border of the fifth dorsal vertebra.

Again, the silence of the OT Hebrew text regarding the lungs may not necessarily be explained by any lack of knowledge about the function of the lungs in breathing. Though they lacked the detailed understanding of the whole mechanism of respiration as explained by modern science, the Hebrews might have had an idea of this through simple observation of the physical expansion and contraction of the chest. However, because of the reference to breathing (נָפַח) and the breath (נִשְׁמָה), we would not have to ignore the prominent role of the throat (physical נֶפֶשׁ) in its connection with the nose, in man's creation (Gen 2:7).

From this it would seem that breathing relates to an external life-giving force, as opposed to the internal life-giving force of blood, an important distinction for our ongoing argument. Though the Israelites understood both blood and breath as נֶפֶשׁ, we do not know how they thought these were connected; the important point is that they are different.

## (2) Blood and Death

Common everyday observation shows that the human body and that of an animal is animated and kept alive and in motion by the presence of adequate amount of blood. This is true of OT physiology which views the flesh of the living thing as vivified by blood, a "principle of life" (Lev 17:10-14). Physical death results with the loss of a considerable amount of blood from the body. In Israelite thought, blood has both positive and negative connotations.<sup>17</sup> Blood could be said to represent the two extreme poles of existence: life and death. This paradox is the most characteristic blood symbolism. Within the body, the blood is a vital power, which animates the

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<sup>17</sup> Blood becomes only a paradox at first sight: The difference is between the spilling and the retention of blood. There has been some suggestion that the OT does not have any negative understanding of blood. See Dennis J. McCarthy, 'Further Notes on the Symbolism of Blood and Sacrifice', *JBL* 92 (1973), pp. 205-210. Among McCarthy's explanations for this is the fact that Israel associated blood with life in a ritual context. The view equating blood with both death and life is also found in some early texts from outside Israel. For the Hittite view, see Harry A. Hoffner, Jr., "Second Millennium Antecedents of the Hebrew 'Ob'," *JBL* 86 (1967), pp. 385-401. The term מָוֶת occurs 262 times in the OT out of which 203 represent "death by violence". Expressions such as "blood of sacrifice" also imply death by violence. Cf. some examples of blood references to death in Lev 20:9; Num. 35:19; Josh 2:19; Ps 30:9; 72:14; 79:10; 116:15; Jer 26:15. C. H. Turnbull also observes that, "blood is not death, but life. The shedding of blood Godward, is not the taking of life, but the giving of life". See C. H. Turnbull, *The Blood Covenant: A Primitive Rite and Its Bearing on Scripture* (Kirkwood: Impact Books, 1975), p. 148.

whole body. We can be fairly certain that blood symbolizes death because basically, it is the vehicle of life whose exit from the body may result in physical or biological death. The mere sight of spilt blood promptly provokes a sense of a wasted life in the psyche of the beholder.<sup>18</sup> It is in this context that blood assumes its death imagery.

Death may be expressed in terms of the נפש leaving the body in the form either of breath or of blood. The degree of the loss of vitality may range from sensations of hunger and thirst, through despair in the form of distress and bitter feelings (Judg 18:25; 1 Sam 1:10), to illness expressed in the form of pining away (Lev 26: 16) and fainting. Death marks the final point of this loss of vitality. In the light of what has been said so far about the נפש, it can be said the loss of blood is loss of vitality, and excessive bleeding imitates the wasting away, draining, or fainting of the נפש.

If in Hebrew thought, the human being can be understood in terms of the union of the נפש-בשר, then death must be the de-coupling of this union, in other words, the permanent separation of the life-principle and the flesh. One might also notice a significant implication in relation to the cultural demand of removing blood from meat before eating it. One implication of the blood-diet prohibition is that in OT conception of identity, death is not an instant experience: under normal circumstances one goes through all the stages represented as death in Israelite thinking, expressed in getting ill, dying in the first instant of loss of either breath or blood, and eventually undergoing decay of the body which ends in the dryness of the bones. Chapter Two explores this theme of death as a process in the context of mortuary practices and stresses the implication of fluid-loss for the dead body. It is evident that the prohibition against the eating of meat with blood is symbolically intelligible in terms of this view of blood in Israelite culture.

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<sup>18</sup> They had to be careful about shedding human blood. In the account of Joseph, the blood of the animal in the ornamented tunic is vividly evoked as a clear representation of Joseph's blood. His brothers represented this blood to their father as a sign of Joseph's death and this Jacob accepted. That blood represents "death by violence" rather than anything else indicates the prominence of death-symbolism of blood in the OT. See A. M. Stibbs, *The Meaning of the Word "Blood" in Scripture*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Tyndale Press, 1962), pp. 10, 16. Stibbs notes that blood is a vivid word symbol for referring to someone's violent death.

The prohibition of eating meat with blood offers a fresh insight into the meaning of death with regard to the removal of fluids from the body. An animal slaughtered for food is not completely killed until all the necessary steps have been taken to render its flesh bloodless. The presence of blood signifies the presence of life, and the eating of it is therefore analogous to the eating of life. The flesh can be eaten only when it is totally bloodless, in other words, completely dead. The only way by which meat can be obtained is by the death of its source. But the prohibition against blood in the Torah suggests that in OT thought, the initial death by slaughtering the animal is not enough. The point at which the blood in meat is completely drained symbolically marks the finality of death. If blood must be completely discharged before the flesh is fit for consumption, then death does not take place finally until all the life-blood has been discharged from the flesh. Obviously, the requirement to drain the blood from meat would seem pointless, unless there was a belief that complete bloodlessness means complete lifelessness and that it takes time to die. This argument lends support to the hypothesis that the presence of certain fluids in the body means life and their absence means death. This is one key theme of this thesis.

In summary, it has been possible, so far, to see the OT concept of blood and life, from a physiological perspective that is framed by symbolic significance. “Life” is understood in terms of נפש. The physiological meaning of נפש associates it with רוח, through the idea of breathing: spirit/air is a source of life external to the body, on which the נפש depends. Deprivation of רוח leads to death, but is not itself death. Death occurs, rather, when the body is deprived of the נפש, associated with blood. This may be a quick process – as when blood is literally spilled – but it is a process, not an instantaneous change of state from being alive to being dead. Consequently, what we would perceive to be a corpse might still be reckoned to be alive – albeit too far advanced in (the process of) death to return to conscious life. This implies that, with regard to our starting point in Leviticus, an animal flesh, which still has its blood, is, in some sense, still alive – which may be a key reason for not eating it.

This initial discussion will be a starting point for our further study of Israelite/Judahite death beliefs and burial practices in chapter 2. First, though, we

shall look more closely at the broader connotations of body fluids, especially blood in Israelite culture. One question concerns the potency of blood outside the body and its power for use in rituals. The response to this question is, of course, beyond natural scientific explanation and demands cultural symbolic analysis. The application of blood in magic, covenants, medicine, sacrifice and related rituals confirms the conception of blood as something more than a physical element sustaining the body. The OT credits blood with religious value. It is in this vein that a further exploration of the conception of blood as life from anthropological and theological perspectives becomes very relevant to our study. The next section deals with this question in terms of the nature of blood symbolism.

### III. Blood as a Cultural Symbol in the OT

Symbolism is common to every culture. For the sake of simplicity, and without analysing the extensive discussion on the nature of symbolism, we may distinguish a symbol from a “sign”, in terms of the sign’s one-to-one correspondence with the object it signifies. A “symbol” has a more complex relationship with what it signifies.<sup>19</sup> A symbol participates in that which it represents, as, for example, Tillich demonstrates in his theology.<sup>20</sup> A symbol evokes or brings together a complex set of diverse elements or a range of ideas, some shared, some individual.<sup>21</sup> An example might be blood, which will evoke a range of ideas. Kunin notes that symbols are particularly useful with religious structures as they allow communication to work on many levels and at the same time, communicate concepts and emotions.<sup>22</sup> Symbols associated with parts of the body, such as body fluids, are able to mobilize the affective possibilities of symbolic communication.<sup>23</sup>

Blood is especially important in this respect, and different ways of handling it can have symbolic meanings for many different cultures. Blood is seen as symbolic

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<sup>19</sup> Seth D. Kunin, ‘Indigenous Traditions and Anthropological Theory’, in Ellen K. Bond et al., eds., *A Companion to Religious Studies and Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), pp. 95-118.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* vol. 3 (London: James Nisbet, 1964), pp. 130-31.

<sup>21</sup> Kunin, “Indigenous Traditions and Anthropological Theory”, pp. 95-118.

<sup>22</sup> Kunin, “Indigenous Traditions and Anthropological Theory”, pp. 95-118.

<sup>23</sup> Kunin, “Indigenous Traditions and Anthropological Theory”, pp. 95-118.

Kunin makes this observation but uses the hair and the intake of food and drink as examples.

of life and also of death in most societies. Blood is a major issue in Israelite thought because experience involving blood, whether it is eating, genital bleeding or ritual application, communicates different aspects of status. Blood causes people to separate and unite. In certain contexts, the use of blood communicates reincorporation, reconciliation and life, while in others it may communicate danger, separation and death. Blood may be eaten in certain societies for the very reason that it represents life,<sup>24</sup> but the Israelites and modern Jews strongly prohibit the eating of blood for the very same reason (Lev 17:10-14). Distinctions of context may be important even within a single culture. So among the Jews, as among other peoples, the blood associated with menstruation is seen as being dangerous and renders the woman impure, and yet in OT thought, bleeding from parts of the body other than the reproductive organ is not said to be defiling.

There is a sense in which one can use the expression “as Israelite as blood” in relation to the Hebrew Culture. Foster has suggested that anything that is used culturally is a symbol.<sup>25</sup> She notes that an apple is a symbol of her culture because it is integrated into their system as something to be eaten when prepared with other ingredients as an ending to a meal (apple pie, apple pan dowdy, etc.), by itself between meals, as a main dish accompaniment for pork (pork sauce), or spread on bread (apple jelly).<sup>26</sup> She observes that, “when cultural rules are devised into which particular objects are integrated, those objects become part of the system of symbolic representation of that culture.” Though she notes that this is not the way symbolism is always defined, following her definition, we can say something similar for blood symbolism in Hebrew thinking.

As is evident from all that has been said so far, blood is not just a physiological component, but also a cultural symbol. Consequently, like other symbols, it has connotations, which depend on context, and so may at times be “ritually” neutral, at times “unclean”. Symbolic connotations may be present in every day life as Foster has shown, but symbolism plays an especially important role in the

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<sup>24</sup> For several examples of this, see C. H. Turnbull, *The Blood Covenant*, pp. 124-126, 128-142.

<sup>25</sup> Mary LeCron Foster and Lucy Jayne Botscharow eds., *The Life of Symbols* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1990), p. 83.

<sup>26</sup> Foster and Botscharow eds., *The Life of Symbols*, p. 83.

ritual maintenance of culture.<sup>27</sup> Victor Turner is but one anthropologist who spells out the role of symbols in the specifically ritual context. In Turner's terms, blood is a "dominant" symbol.

Turner defined ritual as "prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings and powers".<sup>28</sup> He saw a relation between symbols and rituals, defining the former as the smallest unit of ritual, which still retains the specific properties of ritual behaviour; it is a "storage unit" filled with a vast amount of information.<sup>29</sup> According to him, symbols can be objects, activities, words, relationships, events, gestures, or spatial units.<sup>30</sup> Thus for Turner, ritual involved "a stereotyped sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actors' goals and interests".<sup>31</sup> Rituals are storehouses of meaningful symbols by which information is revealed and regarded as authoritative, as dealing with the crucial values of the community.<sup>32</sup>

Turner observed a distinction between instrumental symbols and dominant symbols.<sup>33</sup> Instrumental symbols are the means of attaining the specific goals of each ritual performance. They can be identified only in terms of the total system of symbols, which makes up a particular ritual, because their meaning can be revealed only in relation to other symbols. Dominant symbols appear in many different ritual contexts, but their meaning possesses a high degree of autonomy and consistency throughout the total symbolic system.

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<sup>27</sup> In her book *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas reinterprets rituals of purity to show how their meaning is not limited to the literal ritual being performed; instead, she asserts, "the analysis of ritual symbolism cannot begin until we recognize ritual as an attempt to create and maintain a particular culture, a particular set of assumptions by which experience is controlled". See Mary Douglas, *Implicit Meanings* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 96.

<sup>28</sup> Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), p. 19.

<sup>29</sup> Victor Turner, *The Drums of Affliction A Study of Religious Processes among the Ndembu of Zambia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), pp. 1-2.

<sup>30</sup> Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, p. 19.

<sup>31</sup> Victor Turner, 'Symbols in African Ritual', in *Symbolic Anthropology: A Reader in The Study of Symbols and Meanings*, eds. Janet L. Dolgin et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), pp. 183-194.

<sup>32</sup> Turner, *The Drums of Affliction A Study of Religious Processes among the Ndembu of Zambia*, 2.

<sup>33</sup> Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, pp. 31-32.

Turner identified three properties of dominant symbols:<sup>34</sup> first, condensation, polysemy or multivocality, when one single dominant symbol represents many different things and actions; second, unification of disparate significata, where the underlying meanings of the symbol are interconnected by virtue of their common analogous qualities, or by association in fact or thought; and third, polarization of meaning or bipolarity, in which dominant symbols possess two distinct poles of meaning; at the ideological or normative pole, a cluster of significata refers to components of the moral and social order, and to principles of social organization; at the sensory or orectic pole, the significata are natural or physiological phenomena and processes that arouse desires and feelings. One single dominant symbol comprises both a natural necessity and a social need or desire; it represents both the obligatory and the desirable.

In OT thinking blood may be considered to be one example of what Victor Turner describes as a “dominant ritual symbol”. As Hanson puts it, blood is not a one-dimensional literary motif but rather it is a dynamic symbol of life and death which draws attention to issues of the sacred and profane, of purity and pollution, and of deliverance and judgment.<sup>35</sup>

Consciousness of blood as a symbol is manifested principally in issues of ritual cleanliness/uncleanliness. This issue of cleanliness relates to the idea of ritual purity. In this context purity refers to a status of social inclusion and to a capacity to participate in society, especially with key rites.<sup>36</sup> In OT terms, purity relates to inclusion/exclusion or participation “within the camp” or temporary expulsion from it.

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<sup>34</sup> Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, pp. 28-29; 50-55; *The Drums of Affliction A study of Religious Processes among the Ndembu of Zambia*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>35</sup> K. C. Hanson, ‘Blood and Purity in Leviticus and Revelation’, *Listening: Journal of Religion and Culture* 28 (1993), pp. 215-30.

<sup>36</sup> Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, pp. 2, 5, 35, 40. Douglas links purity with order and, for example, speaks of “dirt” not as “filth” but as matter out of place. For her, things are not considered dirty in and of themselves, but because of where they stand in a system of categories, which can include people as well as non-human classes of animate or inanimate objects. “Dirt is essentially disorder... it exists in the eye of the beholder”. In chasing dirt, in papering, decorating, tidying, we are not governed by anxiety to escape disease, but are positively re-ordering our environment. According to her, “reflection on dirt involves reflection on the relation of order to dis-order, form to formlessness, life to death”. She notes, “Uncleanness or dirt is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained. To recognize this is a first step towards insight into pollution. It involves us in no clear-cut distinction between sacred and secular.” She sees dirt as a by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements.



It is normal to be within the camp. Those who abuse blood, violating blood-related regulations, are removed from society because they become socially impure, thereby confusing the category of normality.

Blood speaks a message about the value of participation in both physical and social life as well as the danger of non-participation and death. Here, the issue turns on categories as engagement. The socially pure in relation to blood are those who manipulate it ritually for their benefit in terms of maintaining their place in society as participants. The socially impure are those who either abuse the sanctity of life by eating blood or are menstruating women. The socially impure are inappropriate elements in society, which must be rejected in order to maintain social order or social purity.

All this involves a classification of participants and non-participants in Israelite society. For example non-participants include those who are said to be unclean such as the *מצרע*, the bleeding woman who is to be removed from within the camp to outside it, and also those that are suffering *כרת* punishments, such as the eater of blood and fat, etc.

The focus of the Israelites was on the integrity of the boundary between the camp and outside it, between the participant and non-participant, between being and non-being. This boundary marks the area of structured relations. The rules regarding blood apply within that area but not outside it.<sup>37</sup> In relation to Israelite cultural classification, the bleeding woman and the eater of blood lie outside the boundary. For example, the eater of blood threatens the boundary that divides the edible from the inedible.

The menstruating woman is a taboo in the sense of not being able to participate in society's key activities because she defies the classification of social fitness.<sup>38</sup> She is socially unfit because she is considered unclean. This expresses the maintenance of a culture's classification of the dynamic life/death elements in the world underlying the keeping or the mixing of individual concepts.<sup>39</sup> In Israelite

<sup>37</sup> Mary Douglas, *Implicit Meanings* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 273.

<sup>38</sup> Cf Douglas, *Implicit Meanings*, p. 271. According to Mary Douglas, "animal kinds which defy the perfect classification of nature are defiling both as food and for entry to the temple".

<sup>39</sup> Mary Douglas, *Implicit Meanings*, p. 272. In Douglas's opinion we can trace a general analogy between the food rules and the other rules against mixtures. She cites Lev 19:19 and Lev 18:23.

society, those who did not qualify for taking part in social life were socially excluded. In this context, social purity means being fit or unfit for social action, it means being able to take part in society. This pragmatic view is important since sometimes “impurity” is used in almost mystical terms.

The OT understanding of blood in physical terms as “life” and the implications of this understanding in terms of the social life of the people cannot be separated. The OT motif that “the life is in the blood” in Lev 17:10-14, a statement about the understanding of blood as life, removes blood from the domestic setting to the cultic environment in the tabernacle/temple. That blood should be used in the cult of the temple because it bears life also indicates that the rituals in which blood is used possess a life-giving motif. In the OT, blood is invested with moral significance. There is no remedy provided for the mishandling of blood by violently spilling it, or eating it. The shedding of blood is sin and attracts dire consequences, namely, death.<sup>40</sup> To shed blood is to misappropriate life. Blood wrongly shed pollutes the land. Such pollution can only be wiped out by shedding the murderer’s blood (Num 35:33). The eating of blood, which is equally dangerous, results in כרת.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, the illegitimate handling of blood is capable of transferring the offender from the sphere of physical life to the sphere of death. However, paradoxically, blood, in OT symbolism, provides a means of moving one from the state of death to one of life. On the one hand, blood causes impurity; on the other hand, it removes impurity. In animal sacrifice, blood does not only speak of the death of a victim, but also of the life of the offerer on whose behalf the blood has been legitimately shed. By “legitimate shedding of blood”, I mean sacrificial bloodshed at the prescribed location of the ritual slaughter. It must be noted that Lev 17:1-5 instructs that sacrificial animals should be slaughtered at the door of the tabernacle. Whoever

<sup>40</sup> Spilt human blood may be very dangerous to the one who shed it. Abel’s blood cried to God from the ground (Gen 4:6). When Job prayed that the earth never cover his blood (Job 16:18), he was asking that the cause of his death is not concealed, in other words, that he is not left without vengeance. The term דם “blood” is employed in OT thinking to designate “bloodguilt” (Num 35:27; Deut 17:8; Josh 2:19; Judg 9:24; 2 Sam 3:27; 1 Kgs 2:37; Hos 6:8). The plural דמים is also used of murder (Exod 22:1, 2; Lev 20:9; Deut 19:10; 22:8; 2 Sam 3:28; Ezek 18:13; 1 Kgs 2:23). The murderer is described as “man/men of blood” (2 Sam 16:8; Ps 5:7; 26:9; Prov 29:10). Both דם and דמים refer to the blood itself and the consequences of its misappropriation.

<sup>41</sup> The term כרת usually referred to as “cut off” may mean “extirpation of the culprit’s entire lineage”. See D. Wold, ‘The Kareth Penalty in P: Rationale and cases’, *SBLSP* 1 (1979), pp. 1-46.

disobeys this command commits bloodshed and consequently, must be cut off from among his people. Blood is legitimately employed in sacrifices and other rituals that require blood. Thus, the use of the images of blood in the dietary and sacrificial systems is remarkable in OT symbolism. Blood therefore becomes a means of life by heeding both the stipulations proscribing its abuse and the stipulations prescribing its legitimate manipulation, especially in the context of sacrifice. Blood language in the OT is about life and death.

#### IV. Sexual Fluids Taboo

What has been said about blood as part of a symbolic system now needs extending to some additional body fluids, to ensure a wide description of the dynamics of the Israelite conceptual scheme as embodied values. So when one is defiled by the emission of fluids through the genital orifices, he/she is impure and therefore rendered unclean. Such a person is to be removed from the midst of the pure in consonance with the OT concept of avoidance of mixing of kinds, that is avoidance of mixing the impure with the pure, the dirty with the clean, and separating the dead from the living. This is a means of leaving or putting things where they belong. The ideas of Mary Douglas will help us in the discussion of the fluid-related taboo in the OT that have to do with the issue of sexual fluids. As Douglas argues, all margins are dangerous.<sup>42</sup> She adds that we should expect the orifices of the body to symbolize its specially vulnerable points.<sup>43</sup> Matter issuing from the orifices such as blood, spittle, milk, urine, faeces, or tears is marginal stuff, and by simply issuing forth, they have traversed the boundary of the body.<sup>44</sup> This is important for her, given the way the physical body is viewed as a microcosm of the “social” body.

In the OT, the purity-impurity distinction operated through the grammar of discourses of bodily exuviae, particularly, fluids. Ritual impurity involved blood in relation to bodily issues, specifically those associated with the reproductive organs. It is not accurate to say that impurity stems from any discharge of body fluids that represent life. Though it is true, on the conceptual level, that when a liquid of life is

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<sup>42</sup> Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 122.

<sup>43</sup> Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 122.

<sup>44</sup> *Purity and Danger*, p. 122

lost from a living organ -- a sort of partial death occurs, the OT does not say every blood-loss from the body leads to impurity. Only semen from the male and blood from the female reproductive organs defile. Blood-loss from any other part of the body may not be impure. This means blood-loss does not necessarily make a woman impure unless it is associated with the reproductive organs. The shedding of such body fluids removed the Israelite from inside to the margins of the society, thereby making her /him socially impure, that is, a non-participant in normal social life. Blood conducts the individual Israelites across the social boundaries; the pure is separated from the impure. Blood momentarily removes the woman to the margins of society, but paradoxically, it is potent and therefore ritually manipulated to return her into her place in society.

Following Douglas' idea of dirt and pollution, we could say that in Israelite terms, sexual fluids render a person impure. For example, contact with sexual fluid such as female blood is polluting and therefore dangerous. Thus the זכה, זבה, נדה, and ילדה, all offend against order, and therefore avoiding them temporarily is a positive effort to organize the environment.<sup>45</sup> The bleeding woman ought to be moved from normal social life because she is, as it were, a misplaced person. She must therefore be moved from or constrained within the social system where she has become out of place. This is because in the Israelite social system, she becomes socially impure and therefore becomes "an element out of place", a taboo. However, after her period of impurity, which is marked by the cessation of blood-flow, she returns to her normal life but not without rituals of cleansing.

We may conclude that Israelite ideas about blood-taboo, their attitudes, and negative conceptions of blood are part of their reaction, which rejects any person, action or idea likely to contradict their cherished classification. Thus, alongside its physical associations with death, blood has strong links to cultural concepts of ritual and social exclusion. However, the OT sees blood both in the light of death and life, but the concept of blood as life dominates that of death. We see this clearly in the ritual manipulation of blood to give life.

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<sup>45</sup> Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 2. Douglas notes "dirt offends against order".

## V. Blood and Ritual

That blood is physically alive and therefore must be employed in rituals on behalf of the life of the individual implies that blood may have several roles in relation to the recipient (God), the offerer and the object to which it is applied. Blood may appear as a price for a ransom for the offerer, a detergent for the altar, or protective to ward off evil, but all these functions are secondary as they lead to one ultimate goal, that is, the preservation of the individual's life. It is possible that in a single blood ritual the blood may have several functions but all point to this ultimate function of giving life, reflecting our earlier comment on Turner's multivocal aspects of symbols.

Significant in our discussion on Israelite rituals is one ritual pattern, the rite of passage. "Rites of passage" refers to rituals that mark a person's transition from one set of socially identified circumstances or status to another. Arnold Van Gennep is well known for this concept, which views all rituals as sacred passages. His monograph entitled *Les Rites de Passage* showed that rituals follow a sequence of three different phases or stages, comprising separation, transition and reincorporation. Whether they were weddings, funerals, initiations, or any other celebration of a change of state, life crisis rituals had a similar structure throughout the world. These rituals of transition brought about a transformation for the individual participating in the ritual, plainly marking new social identities and status. The phase of separation is when an individual is removed from a previous state, the period of transition, the liminal phase, when the individual is neither one thing nor the other, and the final phase of incorporation, when the individual is welcomed back into the community, in a new state. The liminal phase is what Van Gennep associates with the middle or intermediate phase in the structural pattern of many rituals with the crossing of a threshold, *limen* in Latin.<sup>46</sup> This phase is the pivot of ritual action. From Van Gennep, the term liminality became a metaphor for the social borders crossed through rites of passage. Van Gennep notes, "The door is the boundary between the foreign and domestic worlds in the case of an ordinary dwelling, between the profane and sacred worlds in the case of a temple. Therefore to threshold is to unite oneself with a

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<sup>46</sup> The adjective is "liminal" and the noun, "liminality".

new world. It is thus an important act in marriage, adoption, ordination, and funeral ceremonies".<sup>47</sup>

Victor Turner adopted and developed the processual view of ritual from Van Gennep.<sup>48</sup> The liminal phase became a key concept for Victor Turner. For Turner a ritual exemplifies the transition of an individual from one state to another. Turner noted that between the states the ritual subjects are often secluded from everyday life and have to spend some time in an interstructural, liminal situation.<sup>49</sup> The symbols exhibited in the liminal phase express that the "liminal personae" are neither living nor dead, and thus also, both living and dead. Thus, the liminal subjects are "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial".<sup>50</sup> For Turner, in addition to the individuals, the whole community moves through the phases, experiences liminality and undergoes social change. He called this social form of liminality, "communitas".

The topic of boundaries was also vital for Douglas, and with it the symbols that marked such boundaries. For her bodily discharges could be defiling and disqualifying people from approaching the temple.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, in this thesis we stress the uniqueness and paradox of blood among all other body fluids, as that which ritually qualifies a person for approaching the temple. In the chapter on "Powers and Dangers," Douglas focuses her work on those "dangers" characterized by those in the marginal areas whose very presence calls to the forefront the potential for disorder, calling these marginal, or "transitional", subjects both dangerous and powerful. She writes, "Danger lies in the transitional state; simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is indefinable" and that "this danger is controlled by ritual which

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<sup>47</sup> Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, (1909), trans. M. B. Visedom and G. L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 20.

<sup>48</sup> The central core of Turner's approach to ritual are found in the following works of Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967); *The Drums of Affliction A Study of Religious Processes among the Ndembu of Zambia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968) and *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969).

<sup>49</sup> Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, pp. 93-103; *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure*, pp. 94-96, 102-106.

<sup>50</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure*, p. 95.

<sup>51</sup> Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 51.

precisely separates him from his old status, segregates him for a time, and then publicly declares his entry into his new status".<sup>52</sup>

In "External Boundaries" and "Internal Lines" Douglas shows the role of the body in the social system, as well as the body as defined and marked by these rituals of purity, arguing, as we have already mentioned, that "The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious".<sup>53</sup> She adds that the functions of different parts of the body and their relation afford a source of symbols for other complex structures.<sup>54</sup> Following her idea about the body as a symbol of society and the interpretation of rituals concerning such exuviae as excreta, breast milk and saliva, I would argue that in our interpretation of blood rituals we must be ready to see in the body a symbol of society, and also see the powers and dangers credited to social structure reproduced in microcosm in the human body.<sup>55</sup>

Most blood rituals in the OT exemplify this pattern. The OT rites indicate the significance of blood in Israelite status-transforming rituals. A typical case is that on the *מצרע*. Outside the camp, the *מצרע*'s appearance identifies him. His clothes rent, his head bare, his upper lip covered (Lev 13:45). He is perceived as dangerous, taboo, and dead. He begins to live when he is healed. The ritual of reincorporation points to the fact that his return to life is a process rather than an instant experience. I see the rites of the first day as a rite of separation which involves the *מצרע* walking from the place outside the camp, where he was into the old state to the place of liminality in the camp where his status will be transformed, and perhaps being physically parted from the people one linked to in the old state – as he waits to be fully incorporated on the eighth day. The incorporation phase of ritual at the sanctuary involves joining the cured *מצרע* together with his community and his God. The initial rite outside the camp and the final one at the sanctuary both involve blood ritual. In the liminal stage where he is in the camp but remains outside his house and outside the sanctuary, he is neither fully alive nor fully dead, but he is still dangerous. On the seventh day, he

<sup>52</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 116.

<sup>53</sup> Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 115.

<sup>54</sup> Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 115.

<sup>55</sup> See Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 115.

washes his clothes and his flesh in water and becomes clean, and this ritual marks the preparation to cross over from the phase of liminality to reincorporation and “full life”. These will be given a more detailed attention in Chapter Four.

The early mid-twentieth century anthropologist A. M. Hocart is useful here for he viewed rituals as a way of “securing life”, of fostering and encouraging life within human societies,<sup>56</sup> a theme already present in W. Robertson Smith’s seminal work.<sup>57</sup> Coming from Hocart’s viewpoint we may see that at the heart of all blood-rites in the OT lies just such a quest for life. Both the physiological understanding of blood as life and the symbolic view of blood as life, make blood a dominant symbol in Israelite experience and explains their preoccupation with employing blood in rituals in keeping them alive.

## VI. Conclusion

In Israelite thought blood creates a conflict between the individual and society, and also resolves the conflict through rituals. It remains to summarize the results of this enquiry into the blood symbolism and to formulate conclusions. Briefly, in Israelite culture, a distinctive attitude to blood has been related to the worldview of the Israelites, of which the concept of blood as life both within and outside the body is an integral part. In this chapter, I have attempted to show how blood was a highly charged symbol of Israelite social and cultural identity both positively (they were properly alive and participants in social life when they appropriately manipulated blood) and negatively (they were excluded from active participation in social life). The regulation and rituals involving blood, with all the attendant consequences of inclusion and exclusion in the OT suggest an index of involvement in the cultural, social and religious life of Israel.

If the proposed interpretation of social purity and life within the Israelite religious environment is correct, blood would have been a symbolic body fluid the

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<sup>56</sup> A. M. Hocart, *The Life-Giving Myth* (London: Tavistock, 1973 [first publ. 1953]), p. 51. According to Hocart, ritual was a search for “full life”, not for mere existence.

<sup>57</sup> R. W. Smith ‘Sacrifice: Preliminary Survey’ in *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*. First Series, *The Fundamental Institutions* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: A & C Black, 1894), pp. 255-58.



sight and thought of which inspired Israelite reflection on their sense of identity, participation and preservation of life. By blood related rules of avoidance, temporary separation and sacrifice, the sanctity of life was given a physical expression in every encounter with blood in every home and the sanctuary. Therefore, observance of the blood related rules in Leviticus and elsewhere in the OT would have been an unquestionably significant part of Israelite understanding of both physical and social life. Thus, any attempt to understand their ritual practices in the temple, especially sacrifice, must first look at their symbolic understanding of blood as a body life-fluid that can be used to regulate normality and life.

According to Mary Douglas, ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose a system upon an inherently untidy experience.<sup>58</sup> The same can be said of blood-taboos viz., separating the bleeding woman, her undergoing purification, and כרת-punishment for the eater of blood. These are all meant to impose a system on a culturally unacceptable or untidy experience with blood, with the intention of creating order. Similarly I presume that the prohibition against mixing of diverse kinds of things, discussed above, also has to do with the preservation of the order of creation. As Mary Douglas has noted, the Israelite farmer had to preserve the order of creation, so there were to be no hybrids, either in the field, or in the herds or in the clothes made from wool and flax.<sup>59</sup> On the social level, the same principle worked in relation to the separation of the eater of blood, the murderer and the bleeding woman from social life in order to preserve order.

I propose that there is no suggestion that blood acquires a new meaning when outside the body. Our discussions in this chapter have looked at blood from the perspective of its place within the individual's physical body and how it influenced social life. Blood gives life when in the body, but it does not change when it moves outside the body. Blood therefore becomes very significant in this study because as we shall soon see in the chapters that follow, blood as a body fluid is fundamental to the Israelite perceptions of life. Throughout this chapter it has been important to

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<sup>58</sup> Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 4.

<sup>59</sup> Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 54.

develop an approach that brings an anthropologically informed mode of symbolic analysis to bear upon Hebrew social life as textually presented in the OT.

This chapter forms a background to first, the Hebrew physiological understanding of body fluids in relation to life as will be discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, and secondly, to the life-restoring role of blood in the context of OT rituals as explored in chapters 4 and 5. It is important to observe that, whilst the title of this thesis refers to the OT, which might indicate a particular focus on formal and “official” Jewish ideas, the thesis is alert to the fact that burial practices are likely to express the more popular religious belief rather than the “official religion” of the OT.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Bones, Shades and Fluids: Israelite Death Beliefs and Burial Practices

#### I. Introduction

Burial practices and grave contents provide significant evidence for understanding the ancient Israelite concept of fluids and life. The objective of this chapter is to emphasize the identification of life with fluids, and death with dryness as being the way in which the Israelites understood human physiology. Here we have the advantage, of course, of archaeological as well as literary evidence.

Two areas of Israelite/Judahite burial practices point in particular to the significance of fluids for life: first, the practice of making provision for the dead in burial and second, the practice of secondary burial. The latter suggests an Israelite/Judahite thanatology which views death as a process that begins while the body is still wet, and ends in the denudation and dryness of the bones. Though the former does not directly relate to the physical or material body, it is significant because it suggests belief that the shades were quasi-personal beings that possessed the desire for nourishment. This suggestion is important in this study because it lends support to the belief that fluids sustain life. There is limited textual evidence available to support the attempt to piece together a Judahite/Israelite concept of sustenance by fluids in the afterlife. With regard to the Israelite notions of sustenance in the netherworld, I will reconstruct what I can from the archaeological remains, specifically, mortuary accoutrements and inscriptional materials. Clearly, studies on the tombs excavated in the Judahite region provide us with much insight into Judahite death beliefs and burial practices. The finds we are looking at are grave goods. Beginning these discussions with a look at the relevant OT death-beliefs offers us

some appreciable introduction to the discussion on burial practices in subsequent sections of this chapter.

## II. OT Death Beliefs

With regard to the Hebrew understanding of life and death, Aubrey Johnson has observed: "It is necessary to bear in mind that 'life' and 'death' are not always sharply disparate terms. Though poles apart in some respect, they are also used in a relative sense; for ideally at least, 'life' is life in its fullness, and conversely any weakness in life is a form of 'death'".<sup>1</sup> The action of the breath is universally regarded as a vital sign.<sup>2</sup> Once death has taken place the person who once lived becomes a corpse and so is buried in a tomb, as the custom is among the Jews.<sup>3</sup> The destination of the dead is Sheol. Sheol signifies both the grave (for the corpse and bones) and the underworld (a world whose geographical boundaries extends beyond the physical grave for the shades). In a sense, the grave and Sheol are inseparable.<sup>4</sup> A further discussion of Sheol and its inhabitants will shed light on the Israelite concept of the afterlife.

### (1) Sheol: Dusty and Dry

At this point, I shall discuss the nature of the nether world as a dry place, and its relation to the dryness of the bones. The occurrence of the term עפר (dust) will limit our material from the general discussion of the world of the dead to the theme of dryness in Sheol.

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<sup>1</sup>Aubrey R. Johnson, *The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1964), p. 106. Johnson further explains that, on the one hand to be in sickness of body or weakness of circumstance is to experience the disintegrating power of death, and to be brought by Yahweh to the gates of She'ol. On the other hand, to be in good health and be materially prosperous is to be allowed to walk with him in fullness of life (Johnson, *The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel*, pp. 108-109).

<sup>2</sup> Later Judaism puts this in terms of death setting in when the soul is gone out the body. *Mishnah Shabbat* 23:5 warns that a bystander should not touch the dying person before "the exit of the soul". Thus the Mishnah certainly lends support to the belief that death occurs with the exit of the breath.

<sup>3</sup> The tomb is also called קבר. See David Kraemer, *The Meaning of Death in Rabbinic Judaism*, (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> *PI*, p. 462. Pedersen observes that "Sheol is the entirety into which all graves are merged".

Obviously, there are variations of the same phrases for “returning to the earth”. An example is the phrase “return to the dust” which may be regarded as an idiom used in various contexts as a typical metaphor for Sheol or the netherworld (Gen 3:19; Job 10:9; 34:15; Ps 104:29; Eccl 3:20). In Ps 44:29, the idea of “returning to the dust” is still expressed: “... when you take away their breath, they gasp and return to their dust”. Ps 146:4 also says: “when man’s breath departs, he returns to his earth (אֶרֶץ)”. Such terms as אֶרֶץ (earth), אֲדָמָה (ground) and עָפָר (dust) are all significant here, as they tell of the origin and destination of human beings. The idea of “returning” expresses the inevitability of death, a departure from this life after the separation between the breath and the dust of which the body is composed. This dust is a part of אֲדָמָה (Gen 2:7). In Job 10:9, Job exclaims, “Remember that you have made me like חֲמֶר (vase);<sup>5</sup> and will you now make me return to dust?” In Job 34:14, a similar expression is found: “... all the flesh will perish together and man will return to the dust.”<sup>6</sup> The “return to dust” formula in the OT signifies death.

The passage in Ezek 37:1-14 gives a picturesque representation of dry bones hopelessly lying on the ground. Dust is one of the symbols for Sheol. Sheol in various contexts becomes a metaphor for the dust as confirmed in Job’s language in which a עָפָר/שָׂאוֹל combination is found, a pair indicating a parallelism between Sheol and dust: בְּדִי שָׂאֵל תִּרְדָּנָה אֶפְיָחַד עַל-עָפָר נַחַת (Job 17:16). The dust is described as a couch for the dead (Job 20:11; 21:26). Job notes, “now I shall lie down in the dust; and you will seek me in the morning, but I shall not be” (Job 7:21). After death, dust becomes the dwelling place (Isa 26:19) and the sleeping place (Dan 12:2) of the dead person. Dhorme observes, “*se coucher dans la poussière, ce n’est pas seulement être mis en terre, mais encore aller reposer dans le Sheol*”.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> חֲמֶר primarily refers to “clay”, a material from which vases, bowls or vessels are made. The term חֲמֶר in this verse refers to clay as man’s origin.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Eccl 12:7, a variation of the expression which says: “the dust returns to the earth as it was”: cf Sir. 40:11, “all (that came) from the earth will return to the earth”. The relationship of עָפָר with אֶרֶץ is also affirmed in Ps 44:26.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Dhorme, *Le Livre de Job*, (Paris: V. Leoffre, 1926), p. 100. Dhorme explains that sleeping in the dust does not merely being placed in the earth, but also going to rest in Sheol. A similar idea is expressed in Ps 119:25, “My soul cleaves to the dust”.

Humans return to the dust because that is what they are—"dust" (Gen 3:19; Ps 103:14). As Tromp puts it, "the idea of 'returning to the dust' implies that men had previously left it".<sup>8</sup> Sheol refers to the lonely grave into which the corpse is cast at death (Ps 22:15) when worms cover the dead body (Job 21:26). Ps 30:9 says "What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the Sheol? Will the dust praise you?" In this context, the dust refers to the dead body, which returns to dust; this implies the body goes to Sheol. The view of Sheol as the dry dusty abode of the dead provides a context in which dry dust becomes synonymous with death. It is in this dusty region that the dry human bony relics belong, as expressed in the text: "our bones have been scattered at the mouth of Sheol" (Ps 141:7). As it has already been said, in Israelite thought, Sheol does not refer only to the grave where the physical remains of a person is located but also the abode of the shady forms of the dead. The concept of Sheol makes the preservation of the body by way of inhumation and the idea of shades very significant in this study.

## **(2) Cremation**

Throughout history, Israelites and Jews buried their dead either in the ground or in caves. In Israelite burial custom, carrying the dead person to the family burial place, to be "gathered to his fathers" was a means of the dead finding rest in the grave.<sup>9</sup> Burning was inflicted as a punishment (Josh 7:25). The burning of Edom's royal bones was criminal because it made burial impossible (Amos 2:1). Such a treatment of the dead body was reserved for contemptible criminals (Gen 38:24; Lev 20:14; 21:9).<sup>10</sup> However, it was not only a mode of execution but also a form of funerary treatment or a more decent disposal of the dead. A typical OT example is found in the

<sup>8</sup> Nicholas J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), p. 87.

<sup>9</sup> Erling H. Hammershaimb, *The Book of Amos: A Commentary* (tr. John Sturdy; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970), p. 41.

<sup>10</sup> James L. Mays, *Amos: A Commentary* (London: SMC Press, 1960), p. 39. See also Ernest A. Edghill, *The Book of Amos* (London: Methuen & Co., 1926), pp. 17-18. Edghill observes that cremation was condemned in the eastern nations because of the belief that both the body and the soul will find peaceful rest in the abode of the dead. He notes that cremation in Amos 2:1 was "a piece of brutality towards a fallen enemy" and that Moab might have been expected to condemn such an act.

case of the burning of the bodies of Saul and his sons, which may have been to purify them following their desecration by the Philistines (1 Sam 31:9-13; 2 Sam 2:5).<sup>11</sup>

Cremation, the disposal of the corpse by burning, was frowned upon. It is possible that the lack of abundant fuel and other ecological factors relating to paucity of wood-supply might have militated against cremation in Israel. However, it can also be said that presumably, the calcification of the bones into lime was detestable to the eastern nations such as Israel, Moab and Edom, for they regarded the grave as the resting place of the body and of the soul. Cremation was not an acceptable practice in Palestine, except for isolated instances from the New Stone Age discovered in Jerusalem and Gezer.<sup>12</sup> Again, it was an offence because it consisted in the profanation of a corpse by reducing it to ashes, thereby obliterating every trace of that which represented the dead person. One argument about cremation is that it implied the rejection of the belief in physical resurrection.<sup>13</sup> The fact that cremation was regarded as outrageous among the Israelites makes one thing clear and of primary interest: their gathering of the bones of the dead was a significant and cherished funerary custom.

### (3) Identifying the Shades

Death is seen as the weakest form of existence.<sup>14</sup> The body, weakened by the departure of the life-force, is placed in the tomb, where it is believed to experience a minimal continuation of "existence". A careful reading of the OT suggests that according to Hebrew death-belief a person separates into two constituents at death, namely, first, the material corpse, sometimes called the נֶפֶשׁ מֵת, which decomposes and is eventually reduced to bones, and secondly, an immaterial part which becomes

<sup>11</sup> See Eric M. Meyers, *Jewish Ossuaries: Reburial and Rebirth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1971), pp 15-16. There is also the view that the burning of the mutilated bodies of Saul and his sons by the men of Jabesh-Gilead should not be spoken of as a desecration but rather as part of their loyalty to their overlord. See Delbert R. Hillers, "Burial" in *EncJud* 4. 1515. The references to "burnings" at certain funerals in the Old Testament might have possibly referred to the burning of incense rather than cremation (Jer 34:5; 2 Chr 16:14; 21:19).

<sup>12</sup> See R. A. Macalister, *The Excavations of Gezer 1902-1905 and 1907-1909*. 3 vols. (London: Palestine Exploration Fund. 1912), pp. 74ff, 285 ff; J. G. Duncan, 'Fourth Quarterly Report on the Excavation of the Eastern Hill of Jerusalem', *Quarterly Statement of the Palestinian Exploratory Fund*, 1924), pp. 166f.

<sup>13</sup> Pearl Chaim, 'Cremation' in R. J. Zwi Werblowsky and G. Wigoder eds., *Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 137.

<sup>14</sup> Johnson, *The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel*, p. 88.

part of a community of the רפאים, the shades of the dead. There are cases where the term נפש is used to represent the dead (Lev 19:28, 21:1; Num 5:2; 6:11, 9:10; Hag 2:13).<sup>15</sup> However, in the context where the dead is referred to as נפש, it is not the shady existence of the dead in the underworld that is referred to, but rather the מות נפש (the corpse) as opposed to נפש היח (the living body). Parallel with the מתים (the dead) are the רפאים (the shades).<sup>16</sup>

(a) רפאים

With regard to the state of the dead, the Hebrews thought existence continued in the afterlife, though in a shady state. This shady state cannot be defined as life as compared with the state of the living, for the term חיה cannot be used of their existence. Some English versions of the OT translate the רפאים as “shades” (Ps 88:11[Eng. 88:10]).<sup>17</sup> The Hebrew word רפאים is from the root meaning “sunken”, “flaccid”, “powerless”. A few passages in Proverbs also refer to the dead as the inhabitants of the nether world (Prov 2:18; 9:18). In Job 26:5, the abode of the shades, the nether world, reaches down beneath the water of the oceans. It appears that where it refers to the inhabitants of the underworld, רפאים could be interpreted as “shades”, but where it is used of the inhabitants of the upper-world it must not be translated “shades”.<sup>18</sup> Scholars, including Mark S. Smith, appear to favour a

<sup>15</sup> There are other terms like פגר and גויה which can refer to the living person or the dead body. פגר refers to the dead human body or “a corpse”. גויה can represent both the human corpse (I Sam 31:10, 12) and the animal carcass (Judg 14:8-9). Another term, נבלה, can also be used of either the dead human or animal body, but cannot refer to the living body.

<sup>16</sup> See Ps 88:12-13 [Eng. 88:11-12], and Isa 26:14, 19. For examples of the parallelism between מתים and רפאים, see also Phoenician inscriptions referring to those joining the dead רפאים (KAI 13:7-8; 14:8). Cf. Ps 88:11 and Isa 26:14 where both terms appear as parallels. מות refers to the corpse irrespective of gender. A more specific expression for נפש of the corpse is מות נפש, “dead person” (Lev 22:11; Num 6:6).

<sup>17</sup> It is not easy to conclude that the Akkadian *etemmu*, “spirit of the dead”, was the equivalent of the Hebrew רפאים.

<sup>18</sup> For entries on רפאים, see Mark Smith, ‘Rephaim’, *ABD* 5.674-676. Some scholars have discussed the רפאים extensively. See C. E. L’Heureux, *Rank Among the Canaanite Gods* (HSM 21; Missoula: Scholars, 1979); T. J. Lewis, *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit* (HSM 39; Atlanta: Scholars, 1989); W. Horowitz, ‘The Significance of the Rephaim’, *JNSL* 7 (1979), pp. 37-43.



reference to the dead-רפאים in 2 Chr 16:12 where King Asa who was ill, was accused of having consulted the “doctors”.<sup>19</sup> Was the passage referring to רפאים (doctors) or רפאים (the dead)? Obviously, that he saw the “doctors” would not be theologically problematic, as this would not have been morally wrong in the Israelite religious context. It will be more convincing to suggest that he consulted the dead-רפאים.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, in the context of this study, the רפאים refer to a weak and shadowy counterpart of the living person, as the dead were believed to live the lives of the living; they were capable of cooking, eating, drinking and playing. There seems to be every reason to believe that the Israelites regarded the dead as still possessing some form of existence, which rendered them capable of being thirsty for fluids in order to be sustained, and this is one notion I intend investigating in this chapter.

#### (b) אלהים

The term אלהים is an occasional word for the מתים. The dead are divine beings of a kind (Lev 19:28; 21:1, 11; 22:4; Num 5:2; 6:11; 9:6, 7, 10). The dead in Israel could be referred to as אלהים as expressed in 1 Sam 28:13.<sup>21</sup> Some scholars

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This term in the OT was used of, first, the dead in the netherworld, and second, an ethnic group of giants. Thus, the term רפאים is employed for an ancient people as well. See Gen 14:5; Deut 2:10; Num 13:33. The Ugaritic cognate, *rapi'uma*, refers to the royal dead. The distinction must be made clear here. The “dead-רפאים” are the shades and the “living-רפאים” are the giants. The living-רפאים include a race of giants, monarchs, and warriors (Gen 14: 5; Deut 2:10, 11, 20; 3:11, 13; Josh 12:4 and 13:12). The living-רפאים lived close to the nation of Israel. From the Ugaritic point of view, the רפאים is a line of dead kings. P. Bordeuil and D. Pardee, *Le Rituel funéraire ougaritique RS 34* (1982), 126', Syr. 59, 121-128; W. T. Pitard, 'The Ugaritic Funerary Text', *RS 34* (1978), p. 126'. According to Schmidt, the mythological texts do not portray the *rp'um* as the shades of the dead. He reads *rp'um* as “living elites”. Thus for Schmidt, these are living warriors. However, in *KTU 1.161.6-8*, he sees *rp'um* as the dead and thinks this is the only place it applies to the dead. See Brian B. Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead: Ancestor Cult and Necromancy in Ancient Israelite Religion and Tradition* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1994), p. 88.

<sup>19</sup> Smith, 'Rephaim', pp. 674-676.

<sup>20</sup> cf. a similar case in I Sam 28 which suggests the prohibition of consulting the אלהים (the divinely dead).

<sup>21</sup> The dead Samuel was described in the passage as אלהים coming up from the Netherworld. See T. J. Lewis, *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugaritic* (HSM 39; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), pp. 104-117.

have seen ancestors behind references to the term **אלהים**.<sup>22</sup> Some have described the **מתיים** as “foreign gods” (Lev 26:30; Ps 115:4-8).<sup>23</sup> In the context where the term **אלהים** is used of the **מתיים**, it could be acceptable to think of them as “underworld deities”. The **רפאים** can be understood also as “dead heroes”. Among the Israelites, the idea of the **רפאים** suggests a form of life lived by the **מתיים**, a shady replica of this life. If the **מתיים**, **רפאים**, **אלהים** were alive, then they must have basic needs like the living do. The dead are supposed to have an active interest in the affairs of this world.<sup>24</sup> In Rabbinic literature, the continued consciousness of the dead is expressed in these words of R. Isaac: “The sting of a worm to the dead is like the pricking of a pin in the flesh of the living” (Shab. 13b). This concept of death, therefore suggests a belief that death does not destroy human consciousness. It is very obvious that the belief in self-consciousness on the part of the deceased in the afterlife forms a strong basis, not only for the Israelite cult of the dead, but also for such Israelite/Judahite burial practices as secondary burial and the provision of grave goods, as we shall soon discuss.

#### (4) Israelite Cult of the Dead

Cults of the dead involve propitiation of the dead through sacrifice and other forms of ritual activity.<sup>25</sup> Such a practice points to the notion that the dead in the afterlife require provision from the living to sustain them. Such provisions may include food and drink offerings. Discussions of the Israelite and Judahite cult of the dead must consider both biblical and archaeological evidence.<sup>26</sup> As regards the cult of the dead,

<sup>22</sup> K. Van der Toorn, ‘Ilib and the “God of the Father”’, *UF* 25 (1993), pp. 379-387.

<sup>23</sup> See A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, vol. 2. (New Century Bible; London: Oliphants, 1972), p. 744.

<sup>24</sup> For further discussions on the subject regarding the consciousness of the dead, see J. D. Eisenstein, ‘Views and Customs Concerning Death’ in *JEnc* 4.482-86.

<sup>25</sup> Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, p. 472. Levine notes that cults of the dead are aimed at affording the dead an agreeable afterlife and to ensure that the dead would not forget the living and would act benevolently rather than malevolently toward them.

<sup>26</sup> For discussions of both biblical and archaeological evidence of the cult of the dead in Judah, see K. Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (AOAT 219; Neukirchen-Vluyn; Neukirchener Verlag; Butzon & Bercker, 1986); N. J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969); T. J. Lewis, *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit* (HSM 39; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989); L. R. Bailey, *Biblical Perspectives on Death* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979); H. C. Brichto, ‘Kin, Cult, Land and

there have been shifts in opinion over time among scholars.<sup>27</sup> Some modern scholars have cited such references as the Deuteronomic prohibition against feeding the dead tithed food (Deut 26:14), David's sacrifice (I Sam 20:6), and Saul's visit to the witch at Endor (I Sam 28) as textual evidence for an Israelite cult of the dead.<sup>28</sup> In the context of the cult of the dead, we may argue that, since sacrifice has to do with rites, which arise from a common meal, and has connotations, at least, of eating with the deity, there is the possibility that the mortuary provision of food and food containers is understood at some level as a cult sacrifice to the dead. First and foremost, it could be stated that the Deuteronomist's forbidding of certain practices and rituals associated with the dead implies the existence of such practices among the ancient Israelites. Though our interest is not in debating this issue, suffice it to say that the feeding of the dead explicitly mentioned in the OT seems to suggest the existence of such a practice. A little light is shed on the issue by a passage in Deut 26:14:

I have not eaten any of it in my mourning, neither have I taken away any of it for *any* unclean use, nor given any of it to the dead: I have obeyed to the voice of the YHWH my God, *and* have done everything you have commanded me.

The expression, *וְלֹא־נָתַתִּי מִמֶּנּוּ לַמֵּת* “and I have not given of it to the dead” in Deut 26:14, is very significant.<sup>29</sup> The Israelites had tithed their food to YHWH and vowed not to deposit any of it with the dead. The offering of food to the dead must have been sufficiently popular to require such an emphatic mention of abstention from it.

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Afterlife – A Biblical Complex’, *HUCA* 44 (1973), pp. 1-54; Elizabeth M. Bloch-Smith, ‘The Cult of the Dead in Judah: Interpreting the Material Remains’, *JBL* 111 (1992), pp. 213-224; E. M. Meyers, ‘Secondary Burials in Palestine’, *BA* 33 (1970), pp. 2-29; L. Y. Rahmani, ‘Ancient Jerusalem’s Funerary Customs and Tombs. Part Two’, *BA* 44 (1981), pp. 229-35.

<sup>27</sup> There have been scholars who did not believe in a cult of the dead in Israel. See Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel: From its Beginning to the Babylonian Exile* (tr. M. Greenberg; New York: Schocken, 1972), p. 315. Kaufmann thinks Biblical rites for the dead were not religious acts: they did not constitute cultic activity but rather ethical behaviour. For the Deuteronomic, Psalmic and prophetic objections to the cult of the dead (feeding and consulting the dead), see Deut 26:14, Ps 106:28.

<sup>28</sup> *PI*, pp. 3-4, 484; A. Lods *Israel: Des Origines au Milieu du VIII<sup>e</sup> Siecle*, Series Evolution de L’humanite 27 (Paris: Renaissance du Livre, 1932), 224; G. Quell, *Die Auffassung des Todes in Israel* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1925), p. 24. For references to biblical information about the cult of the dead within the OT, see Isa 8:19 whereas in I Sam 28 *אלהים* refers to the dead; Deut 26:14; Gen 28:17-18; 31:53-54; Isa 57:8; 2 Chr 16:14; 32:33; 1 Sam 1:21; 2:19; 20:6, 29.

<sup>29</sup> The LXX reads “οὐκ ἔδωκα ἀπ’ αὐτῶν τῷ τεθνηκότι” “nor have I given *off*from them *to*/ for the dead”.

There has been some scholarly discussion on the cult of the dead. A typical example is the presence in Syria and Palestine of tombs with tubes built into the ceiling, used by survivors to introduce offerings into the tomb.<sup>30</sup> Claude Shaeffer identifies holes in the roofs of some of the tombs. He sees the dropping of food offerings into the tomb through libation installations as a more convenient way than having to open the tomb each time food had to be given to the dead.<sup>31</sup> But Pitard considers Shaeffer's interpretation highly suspect.<sup>32</sup> Pitard attempts to dispute the generally accepted proposal that the Israelites participated in regular offerings of libation to the dead through holes in the ceiling of tombs in Israel as also found in Ugarit. He sees the reference to tomb structure with libation holes in Ugarit as problematic and suggests that the proposed examples of the same thing in Israel should be approached with caution.<sup>33</sup>

Another significant reference is Psalm 106:28, which reads: "They joined themselves also unto Baal-Peor, and ate the sacrifices of the dead." This passage has been seen as another potential text referring to the afterlife. What is referred to here is the eating of the sacrifices of the dead. The expression מַתֵּי מִתִּי (LXX: θυσίαι νεκρῶν) is literally "sacrifices of the dead". It could be rendered, "sacrifices offered to the dead". The expression suggests a kind of feast the surviving relatives had at the grave. This is a reference to the feeding of the dead through sacrifice.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Wayne T. Pitard, 'Tombs and Offerings: Archaeological Data and Comparative Methodology in the Study of Death in Israel', in Barry Gittlen ed., *Sacred Time Sacred Place: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 145-167.

<sup>31</sup> C. F. A. Shaeffer, *The Cuneiform Texts of Ras Shamra -Ugarit* (Schweich Lectures 1936; London: Oxford University, 1939), p. 51.

<sup>32</sup> Pitard, 'Tombs and Offerings', pp. 145-167. Pitard thinks a much more plausible interpretation is to see them as "holes made in the roofs by the vandals who robbed the tombs in antiquity". See also Wayne T. Pitard, "'The Libation Installations' of the Tombs at Ugarit', *BA* 57 (1994), pp. 20-37.

<sup>33</sup> Pitard, 'Tombs and Offerings', pp. 145-167. Referring to Ribar's works on death cult practices in ancient Palestine in J. W. Ribar, 'Death Cult Practices in Ancient Palestine' (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1973), Pitard argues that, though at the time of Ribar's writing the Ugaritic tombs were thought to show widespread appearance of the practice of offering of libations to the dead through the holes in the tomb ceilings, this proposal has now been discredited. Pitard finds Ribar's examples of this practice problematic for his interpretation on archaeological grounds. To some extent, Pitard accepts Tomb 2 at Beth Shemesh as actually providing a plausible example that could be interpreted in this fashion with the tomb at Achzib as a second possible example.

<sup>34</sup> Baruch A. Levine, 'Ritual as Symbol: Modes of Sacrifice in Israelite Religion', in B. M. Gittlen ed., *Sacred Space, Sacred Time: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2002), pp. 125-135. Levine takes the term מִתִּי to be cognate with Akkadian *zibu* ("meal"). He notes, "that does not, in the first instance, mean 'slain offering' or the like, although it was often realised in the way".

Undoubtedly, זָבַחַי מַתִּים was a Moabite rite.<sup>35</sup> According to Pope, the Israelites adopted such a practice while they were in Moab.<sup>36</sup> The passage in Ps 106:28-31 is related to Num 25:1-13. From these texts it appears that the מַתִּים are divinities, worshipped as gods. According to Allen, “the dead” in Ps 106:28 seems to be a comment on “their gods” in Num 25:2.<sup>37</sup> This is a type of sacrifice which entails a fellowship meal, the eating of which established a communion and covenant between the dead and the worshippers who had “yoked themselves” with Baal-Peor. Thus the celebration of such a sacrifice was tantamount to communion with the dead.<sup>38</sup> Some have interpreted this as “the common practice of sharing meals with ancestral spirits”.<sup>39</sup> It is most likely that this kind of sacrifice referred to some burial ritual similar to that in Deut 26:14.

Perhaps we may say that, as generally known of sacrifices, they are primarily offered to seek the favour of the gods. Were the זָבַחַי מַתִּים here designed to win for the offerer a favour from the dead? Since most sacrifices were communal and therefore involved the deity and his worshipers partaking of a common meal, can it be said that the זָבַחַי מַתִּים were meant to feed the dead? As regards sacrifices offered to the dead or offerings deposited in the grave, E. S. Hartland has suggested that food offerings are given in order to prevent the hungry shades from eating of the food in the other world.<sup>40</sup> Whether sacrificial meals were celebrated at a tomb is implied here

<sup>35</sup> This rite might have been known in various places in the ancient world. In Greek mythology, Odysseus offers sacrifice to the dead in accordance with Circe's instructions. With lambs she has provided, the sacrifice is performed in a trench and is intended to provide blood for the feeding of the dead (Odyssey 10.516-40, 571-72; 11.26-47). Vidal-Naquet observes that this is the opposite of a sacrificial meal whose purpose is to feed the living. For his comment, see also Pierre Vidal-Naquet, 'Land and Sacrifice in Odyssey: A Study of Religious and Mythical Meanings', (tr. A. Szegedy-Maszak) in Seth L. Schein ed. *Reading the Odyssey: Selected Interpretative Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 35-54.

<sup>36</sup> M. Pope, *Song of Songs* (AB; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), pp. 217. Baal-Peor was a god of the Moabites, Midianites and Ammonites. This god was worshipped on Peor, a hill in the Moabite territory (Num 23:28). Other references to Baal-Peor include Num 25:3ff; 31:16 and Josh 22:17.

<sup>37</sup> Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-105* (WBC; Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002), p. 72.

<sup>38</sup> As noted in the *Interpreters Bible* vol. 4, p. 568, one alternative interpretation may see the מַתִּים in Ps 106:28 as an epithet for idols. This idea may be compared with Ps 115:4-7; Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Commentary*, (tr. Hilton C. Oswald; Augsburg, Minn. 1989), p. 320.

<sup>39</sup> T. H. Gaster, 'Sacrifices' in *IDB*, pp. 147-159. Thus, these ancestral spirits were believed to be part of the seasonal festivals of the living.

<sup>40</sup> Edwin S. Hartland, *The Science of Fairy Tales: An Inquiry into Fairy Mythology* (London: Walter Scott, 1891), p. 47. There was the belief that once the hungry shades eat of the food in this world it would be obliged to stay here forever.

in Ps 106 or not, there is nothing in this passage suggesting the funerary character of such meals.

Another Psalm referring to blood libation is worth noting. The context in which “the libations of blood” is mentioned in Ps 16:3-4 suggests a heathen practice detestable to the Israelites.<sup>41</sup> Who are the “holy ones” referred to here in Ps 16:3? They have been variously understood as “the dead”, the “saints in the earth” or the “saints in the land”.<sup>42</sup> In Ps 16:3-4, if the dead could be understood as לְקַדְּשִׁים אֲשֶׁר-בָּאָרֶץ (i.e., holy ones in the underworld), then “I will have no part in their bloody libations” in Ps 16:4 could mean sacrifices for the dead.<sup>43</sup> But it will be too hasty to suggest that the Ps 16:3-4 represents another זֶבַח מֵתִים that involved blood offering to the dead. Perhaps it might refer to sacrifice to some god, but this can only be speculative as the word “god” supplied by the various English versions is absent in the Hebrew text of the OT. It seems appropriate to infer from these OT references discussed above that ancient Hebrew worshippers might have seen in the זֶבַח מֵתִים, a common meal between the living and the shades of the departed who become guests at such meals.

Analysis of the Hebrew texts does not produce arguments in favour of the interpretation of the cult of the dead as feeding or quenching the thirst of the dead. It does not show that issues of thirst and the vitality of fluids were of great concern to the Israelites. From the Hebrew texts, it is obviously difficult to investigate what concepts of sustenance of the dead prevailed among the ancient Israelites. But certainly, the silence of the Hebrew text about the provision of fluids for the dead does not mean that the idea of provision of fluids to the dead did not exist.

It is clear from this section that the dead go as “spirits” to Sheol in Israelite thought. There is no clear evidence that they are worshipped thereafter, and no reason to believe that they have religious significance. Nevertheless, we do find provisioning in Israelite/Judahite tombs. Since the grave goods cannot be “offerings” if there is no cult of ancestor worship, and since they are placed in the tomb at the time of burial,

<sup>41</sup> Cf Isa 65:4). YHWH would accept only drink offerings of wine (Exod 29:40, Num 28:7-8). See also R. W. Smith, ‘Sacrifice: Preliminary Survey’, pp. 213-43.

<sup>42</sup> See *IB*, 4.82.

<sup>43</sup> K. Spronk, *Beautiful Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, pp. 334-337.

they must be considered as simply intended for the use of the dead on their way to, or in, the afterlife.

In the next section of this chapter, we shall examine a variety of grave goods in Israelite/Judahite tombs. Were the vessels among the goods meant to provide nourishment and drink for the sustenance of the shades? Some may argue that the presence of a variety of vessels among the mortuary goods in the Judahite region does not necessarily render their interpretation as fluid suppliers very likely. However, the sustenance of the shades might have been crucial in Israelite thought as Toorn rightly notes regarding the scarcely joyful Israelite: “in the dim existence of the netherworld, all that spirits really care for is some food and cool water”.<sup>44</sup>

### III. Burial Goods: Shades and Fluids

#### (1) **Revivifying the Shades with Fluids: Israelite/Judahite Ideas**

There is limited evidence in the OT to suggest either that the dead were worshipped or that any arrangements were made to provide them with continuing sustenance – e.g., pipes or offering altars. The OT is silent on the subject of furnishing the dead with provisions for the afterlife. Probably, this practice was considered a matter outside the religious sphere. Some limited evidence of food and drink for the afterlife, provided at the time of burial might indicate provision either intended, therefore, as a short-term measure, or as provision in perpetuity.<sup>45</sup>

Of the references to the dead and the afterlife, particularly the sustenance of the shades in the underworld, there are only a few Hebrew texts.<sup>46</sup> As Pitard rightly observes, what we find in the OT are “scant, rather off-hand, ambiguous and non-specific references and allusions to the subject in a variety of contexts”.<sup>47</sup> Obviously, the meaning of the presence in Israelite tombs of mortuary provisioning is hard to interpret, especially with the lack of Hebrew textual evidence. Having acknowledged

<sup>44</sup> Karel van der Toorn, ‘Israelite Figurines: A View from the Texts’, in B. M. Gittlen ed.; *Sacred Time, Sacred Place: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2002), p. 54.

<sup>45</sup> I acknowledge that while it is true that the dead probably thirsted, the connection of this with body fluids is not established yet.

<sup>46</sup> Pitard, ‘Tombs and Offering’, pp. 145-167. Pitard notes, “the subject of death and afterlife does not form a primary theme in any book of the Hebrew Bible”.

<sup>47</sup> Pitard, ‘Tombs and Offering’, pp. 145-167.

how poor the Hebrew text is in providing textual information about the Israelite concept of the afterlife, we may turn to archaeological data, which in our context appears to have greater potential to supply more information for unpacking the Judahite death belief regarding the sustenance of the shades in the afterlife.

In this investigation of ancient Israelite/Judahite beliefs in the afterlife in relation to their burial practices, the main objects of study includes burial artefacts uncovered by archaeologists in Palestine. Extensive excavation of Judahite tomb sites has shown that the content of the tombs comprise not only dry bony relics of the dead but sometimes, various goods needed and used in daily life by the living. Among the burial provisions were food containers and liquid vessels, which pose the question of whether or not these vessels deposited in the tomb were intended for the dead. Were they simply discarded at the location of burial after their content was used or consumed by the surviving mourners in a funerary feast? By this investigation, I am attempting to reconstruct blurred pictures of the ancient period of Israelite life, and concepts about the sustenance of the רפאים by the intake of fluids.

Honestly, we must recognise the difficulty in explaining the death-belief system that lies behind archaeological remains. There are difficulties associated with interpreting tomb-contents.<sup>48</sup> Pitard has noted how complex archaeology and comparative methodology has been in the study of death in Israel.<sup>49</sup> He highlights the need for scholars to be more careful in how they interpret archaeological evidence. However without the archaeological evidence we have through the excavation of tombs, very little would be known from Hebrew textual sources about the apparent Judahite notion of the need for the provision of fluids for the shades in the afterlife. Owing to the problem of interpretation regarding the study of tomb offerings, much of my archaeological interpretation in this study will be speculative.<sup>50</sup>

To begin with, there is also a problem with dating of the grave contents. Whatever may be the ultimate agreement among archaeologists as regards the dating

<sup>48</sup>Wayne T. Pitard, 'Tombs and Offerings', pp. 145-167. Pitard reminds us that the problem with what material remains can tell us about the belief systems of those who created them is that these remains are susceptible to numerous potential and plausible interpretations.

<sup>49</sup> Pitard, 'Tombs and Offerings' pp. 145-167.

<sup>50</sup> For a detail discussion of interpreting archaeological remains, see Pitard, 'Tombs and Offerings', pp. 145-167. Wayne advises, "to make sure that we build our reconstruction of Israelite thought more soundly by considering exactly what the evidence can tell us and by clearly labelling speculation-when moving beyond evidence". Pitard, 'Tombs and Offerings', pp. 145-167.



of the grave artefacts, it may be noted that the Iron I/Iron II datings are generally too imprecise for us to relate the burials directly to specific periods of Judahite/Israelite history. At the present state of archaeological research and scientific discoveries, we must still express a note of caution about the accuracy of the dating of the grave goods that have been discovered so far. Perhaps, it will be better to maintain our optimism by assuming that with a future increase of relevant data, we would be able to arrive at a more accurate dating, which will foster a greater consensus among scholars.

It is important to note that archaeology offers data, not explanations. Therefore, we must recognize that a variety of interpretations is always possible. All the same, the evidence strongly suggests that the dead were (often, at least) furnished with provisions for the afterlife. This, in turn, implies that they continued to have physical needs. The evidence, most of which cannot be dated with precision, has been collected and assessed by Rivka Gonen, Elizabeth Bloch-Smith and Rachel Hachlili. Their works have contributed immensely toward a deep understanding and appreciation of Canaanite and Israelite mortuary practices.<sup>51</sup>

Perhaps the most comprehensive study of the Judahite grave contents is that undertaken by Bloch-Smith. In her book, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, Bloch-Smith, among other interests, concentrates basically on differentiating mortuary goods on the basis of age, sex, social status and wealth of the deceased.<sup>52</sup> Both J. Abercrombie and Bloch-Smith studied pottery forms preserved in various graves.<sup>53</sup> In her attempt to refine Abercrombie's results, which distinguished five pottery patterns, Bloch-Smith divides the tombs into early (twelfth and eleventh century BCE) and late (tenth through the first quarter of the sixth century BCE) phases. She observes that among the physical remains in Judahite tombs are various

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<sup>51</sup> While Bloch-Smith concentrates on Iron Age Judahite burial types and grave contents, Gonen's work is on Late Bronze Age Canaanite funerary practices. See E. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead* (JSOT Sup. 123; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), pp. 25-62, 63-108; Rivka Gonen, *Burial Patterns and Cultural Diversity in Late Bronze Age Canaan* (ASORDS 7; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1992), pp. 9-31.

<sup>52</sup> Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs About the Dead* (JSOTSup. 123; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), pp. 140-141.

<sup>53</sup> J. R. Abercrombie, 'Palestinian Burial Practices from 1200 to 600 BCE' (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1979), pp. 56-159; Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs About the Dead*, 72-81.

mortuary provisions for sustenance, safety, and supplication to be used by the deceased in the afterlife.<sup>54</sup>

The following conclusions from Bloch-Smith's discussion on the prevalent pottery forms charted from the twelfth through the eighth century BCE are relevant to our study. From the late thirteenth century through the eleventh centuries BCE, storejars and dipper juglets were provided in various tomb types at Deir el-Balah, Lachish, Meggido, and Tell es-Saidiyeh, Gibeon, Gezer, Aitun and Madeba. By the tenth century BCE they had become widespread. During these centuries BCE, other vessels forming part of the pottery assemblages included lamps and such dining-related vessels as bowls, craters, pyxides, jugs, chalices and pilgrim flasks. During the tenth to ninth century BCE, the pottery repertoire had been augmented with new pottery forms including cooking pots, plates and platters.<sup>55</sup> Beginning in the tenth century BCE, amphorae had appeared in Phoenician coastal burials and wine decanters were provided in burials in the vicinity of Jerusalem and Amman in the ninth century BCE.<sup>56</sup> The study by Bloch-Smith demonstrates the predominance of food and drink related assemblages among the mortuary provisions found in various Judahite burials sites from the thirteenth through the eighth century BCE.<sup>57</sup> Thus mortuary provisioning continued throughout the period of the existence of the kingdom, and to the later periods. Following the dating accepted by Bloch-Smith, we may argue that the presence of liquid carrying vessels among the mortuary provisions constituted a normal feature of the Israelite/Judahite burial practices from the thirteenth century to the sixth century BCE.

In a generalized classification, Bloch-Smith differentiates the functional nature of burial provisions on the basis of protection, entertainment or amusement, bright environment, personal decorative items, and above all, nourishment.<sup>58</sup> As regards the

<sup>54</sup> Elizabeth M. Bloch-Smith, 'The Cult of the Dead in Judah: Interpreting the Material Remains', *JBL* 3 (1992), pp. 213-224.

<sup>55</sup> Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, p. 80. The presence of cooking pots (and knife) suggests that the living relatives believed the deceased continued the basic responsibilities of cooking.

<sup>56</sup> Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, pp. 73, 80.

<sup>57</sup> These sites include: North Coast, Israel, South Coast, Shephelah, Southern Highlands, Jordan River Valley, and Transjordanian Plateau.

<sup>58</sup> See Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, 65-66. Provisions included game pieces; rattles; lamps, pillar-female figurines, scarabs, Egyptian amulets and other magical or protective items. This indicates that the deceased required the benefits of apotropaic elements such as

food and liquid containers, she notes that nourishment was of paramount importance in the afterlife. Obviously, this need-based classification is the heart of the rationale for the whole idea and practice of mortuary provision. We may note the significance of Bloch-Smith's work, as indicating the continuing needs of the dead. Given that the selection of the burial assemblages is determined by the perceived needs of the departed, our investigation is based on the functions of the provisions with particular attention given to the need for nourishment with food and fluids.

Hachlili also observes that grave goods discovered with ossuary burial tombs include unguentaria, bowls, lamps, cooking pots and glass vessels all identical to those used in daily life.<sup>59</sup> According to her, this practice was widespread throughout the Hellenistic and pagan world; however, the Jews gave this custom their own interpretation by ignoring the connotation of an offering to the dead for their use in the afterlife.<sup>60</sup> Hachlili thinks the Jews might have placed personal belongings to the deceased in their tombs because the scene aroused the grief of the onlookers.<sup>61</sup> Hachlili's view that the Jews gave their own interpretation to their burial customs is open to question and other interpretations should not be ignored. Indeed, for some scholars, the grave vessels may be interpreted as having a cultic function.<sup>62</sup>

However, it still remains true that we cannot entirely proscribe intelligent conjecture from this field of scholarship, and something can be said about the presence of the liquid-vessels among the burial provisions in the tombs. It appears that burial in tombs often involved various ceremonies, including offerings and sharing of food and drink. Thus, we see bowls, cooking pots, storage jars, juglets, jugs and other nourishment-related vessels found in numerous burial sites in and

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the amuletic powers of jewellery. There were also jewellery and ornaments for adornment such as coloured beads, earrings, necklace, clasp, bracelets, anklets and rings, toggle pins, mirrors, combs and cosmetic accoutrements. These jewellery pieces may have been seen as possessing not only decorative, but protective functions as well. There were also arrowheads, javelin heads, spearheads and blades, these being offensive weapons undoubtedly provided for self-defence. Cooking pots for the preparation of food; bowls, craters, plates and platters for serving and storing meals; and jars, jugs, juglets, amphorae, cups, pyxides, chalices, pilgrim flasks and decanters for serving and storing liquid such as water and wine.

<sup>59</sup> Rachel Hachlili, 'Burials', in *ABD* 1.785-794.

<sup>60</sup> Hachlili, 'Burials', pp. 785 - 794.

<sup>61</sup> Hachli li, 'Burials', pp. 785 - 794.

<sup>62</sup> The deposit of food in the tomb has been variously interpreted. Some scholars think the food represents an offering to the dead as a deified spirit. See Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, pp. 122-126.

around the Judean region. A typical example can be found in burials in Lachish, dating from the tenth century BCE.<sup>63</sup> In some of the graves a storejar stood erect between and near the feet of the dead as it had been placed at the time of burial (Graves 132, 139, 147).<sup>64</sup> In Grave 110, which Tufnell dates to the period between the late tenth and the early ninth century BCE, were found among other objects, such fluid containers as two bowls, two dipper juglets, two mini-amphoras, and one stone jar.<sup>65</sup>

Presumably, these mortuary objects point to ritual activity associated with the burial and sustenance in the afterlife. One would wonder why the mourners would have left the vessels behind inside the tombs instead of carrying them home if they had simply feasted with them. Would the response to this be that they would have been contaminated by their use at the grave? It is less likely that the leaving of the vessels in the tombs after a funerary feast had to do with issues of impurity of the corpse and objects associated with the dead. It seems more plausible that these vessels might have been left in the tombs for the dead with a notion that the “living-dead” would need them.

Our discussion on the contribution of archaeological evidence towards the understanding of the relationship between fluids and sustenance in the afterlife is very important. It has been well understood that interpreting grave goods found in archaeological excavations is very complicated and so there are limits to appropriate deduction from them, especially regarding the cultural and religious beliefs of a people. But that does not mean that the presence and nature of these finds cannot allow any intelligent guesses as to the possible basis underlying their provision. The provision of food and liquid-vessels could signify the desire of the surviving relatives to satisfy the hunger and thirst of the departed. The liquid-vessels represent a notion of providing vitality and strength for the seemingly weak “lives” of the רפאים.

From the archaeological evidence discussed in this section relating to fluid-containers accompanying Israelite and Judahite burial, we may conclude that, to these people, fluids would do the dead some good by way of invigorating them. In contrast

<sup>63</sup> We here refer to simple burials excavated by the Wellcome-Colt/ Wellcome-Marston Archaeological Research Expedition. See Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, p. 182.

<sup>64</sup> Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, p. 182.

<sup>65</sup> O. Tufnell, *Lachish III: The Iron Age* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 172.

to this argument, Bloch-Smith, looking at it from another point of view, argues that the living would want to appease the deceased by providing nourishment because the dead were believed to continue living with benevolent and perhaps malevolent power.<sup>66</sup> However, her suggestion does not still change our hypothesis that, in ancient Israelite thought, the dead needed fluids because the lack of moisture enfeebled or even threatened the well-being of Sheol's inhabitants.

The Hebrew attitude towards life beyond death in relation to dependence on fluids can be summed up as follows: 1) human life is on-going in a shady existence after death, and 2) the shades exhibit desires similar to those of the living, such as drinking for their sustenance. It is therefore more logical to ally with those who argue that the food and drink were provided because, like the living, the dead continue to have the need for sustenance in the afterlife. The suggestion that the grave goods must have been considered as intended for the use of the dead in the afterlife is reminiscent of Egyptian and Mesopotamian practices.

## **(2) Ancient Egyptian Beliefs in the Afterlife**

The Egyptians believed that some elements of the person remained in this world to gather nutrition. There is no evidence of such a belief in Israel – nor is there evidence of continuing provision. Most probably, the food in some sense dies with the person and serves them in perpetuity. However, an examination of the ancient Egyptian death beliefs has shown how close their ideas were to those of the Israelites with regard to the sustenance of the dead in the afterlife. How much did the Israelites share with Egypt in the matter of the sustenance of the dead in the afterlife? This is difficult to tell.<sup>67</sup> However, we can draw analogies from Egyptian beliefs in the afterlife by looking at their mortuary practices. In this section, we briefly explore an example of such beliefs with particular reference to the concept of sustaining the dead with fluids.

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<sup>66</sup> Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, p. 122.

<sup>67</sup> See Philip. S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press; 2002), p. 233. Johnston clearly states that Egypt had no obvious influence on Israelite resurrection belief

The ancient Egyptians believed in life beyond death.<sup>68</sup> Mummies and various artefacts found in tombs in Egypt today testify to Egyptian death beliefs. The tomb served as a house, and was therefore furnished with the necessities of daily life. Mortuary chapels attached to the tombs were places where offerings might be made to the dead who were believed to be in need of food and drink in the afterlife.<sup>69</sup>

They believed that every individual was made up of several parts. One of these parts is the *k3* (ka).<sup>70</sup> A surviving relative of the dead, or a priest on behalf of the relative, was expected to bring offerings of food and drink to the tomb to nourish the dead person's *k3*. Another part of the individual is the *b3* (ba). The *b3* was the manifestation of an individual after death and was depicted as a bird, which moved quietly around in the tomb bringing air and food to the dead person. As H. Frankfort described it, "the *b3* was not part of a living person but the whole of a person as he appears after death".<sup>71</sup> The *b3* with the body, made up an individual, and both were believed to have come into existence at birth.<sup>72</sup>

They believed that death was not just the end of physical life in this world but also the beginning of another life. In the afterlife, the deceased was believed to have the same needs as the living. The tomb was therefore to be sufficiently equipped with every day items, which the dead person would need in the journey of the afterlife. Inside the tombs, clothing, toilet requisites, jewellery, vases, spots, dishes containing

<sup>68</sup> This can be confirmed by Gardener's observation, that the names of dead persons in inscriptions of the Eighteenth Dynasty are frequently followed by the epithet "living again", more literally, "repeating life". See Alan H. Gardiner, *The Attitude of the Ancient Egyptian to Death and the Dead* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), 13.

<sup>69</sup> A. B. Mercer, *The Religion of Ancient Egypt* (London: Luzac & Co. 1949), p. 320.

<sup>70</sup> To say an individual has gone to his *k3* in the afterlife became a euphemism for death. Mercer, *The Religion of Ancient Egypt*, p. 315. The Egyptian phrase *zbl(?) n k3-f* "gone to his *k3*" means "dead". See Gardiner, *The Attitude of the Ancient Egyptian to Death and the Dead*, 40. It must also be noted that, in the Old Kingdom period (2686 to 2181 B.C. – dynasties III and IV), individuals were thought to have joined their *k3* only at death. But the Middle Kingdom (2040 to 1782 B.C. – dynasties XI and XII), and New Kingdom (1570 to 1070 B.C. – dynasties XVIII and XX), texts suggest that a *k3* was born with everyone. Statues and funerary masks duplicated the look of the body. The Egyptians believed the statue of the dead, referred to as the "*k3* statue", could be transformed into a residence for a person's *k3*. S. Morenz suggests that the *k3* is in the habit of takes its abode in the statue, and that the statue benefits from the funerary provisions at least as much as the corpse itself does. See Siegfried Morenz, *Egyptian Religion* (tr. Ann E. Keep; Ithaca: Cornell Paperbacks; 1992), p. 204.

<sup>71</sup> H. Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion: An Interpretation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948), p. 96-97.

<sup>72</sup> Mercer, *The Religion of Ancient Egypt*, p. 315.

food, amulet, *ushabtu*, weapons and assorted tools depending on the occupation of the deceased were provided as supplies for the afterlife.<sup>73</sup>

The Egyptians visited the tombs to make offerings to the *k3*. They sometimes gathered on feast days and had a meal at which the dead were believed to be present. Bread, beer, wine and other funerary offerings were provided either directly by mourners or indirectly, through inscription and the scenes from every day life painted on the walls in the tomb.<sup>74</sup> The presence of liquid vessels in the tombs, as well as the representation of drink among other gifts, in picture form, were thought to be capable of procuring for the dead, the liquid so pictured or represented by the container.<sup>75</sup> The offerings were meant to cause both the *b3* and the *k3* to live forever.<sup>76</sup> There were tomb scenes showing the tomb owners sitting in front of offering tables piled with bread. Thus, in many a case supplies provided were also duplicated in other forms.

The Egyptians believed that pictures, models, and written words could magically become real themselves if by any means the original items were destroyed or lost. This means, once the actual offerings ceased, the representations of food and drink depicted on the walls would be magically transformed to supply the needs of the tomb's occupant. From the foregoing, we realize that Egypt provides us with a fair amount of archaeological material from which we can extract a reasonable amount of information regarding their belief in the sustenance of the dead with fluids.

The implication here is that such ancient peoples like the Israelites and Egyptians could not imagine an afterlife in other world, whatever form it may be, to persist without sustenance in the form that this world requires it. The same can be said for the Mesopotamians.

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<sup>73</sup> They believed the tomb-owner would continue after death the occupations of this life. Such provisions as food, wine, beer and all other things were thought to be necessary for the pleasure and protection of the dead. Adolf Erman, *Die Religion der Aegypter*, (Berlin und Leipzig, Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1934), p. 255.

<sup>74</sup> See Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, p. 202. A typical example of such a scene is found in the tomb of Kaemankh at Giza, see H. Junker (ed.), *Giza*, IV (Wien: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1929-1955), p. 43ff.

<sup>75</sup> See Stephen Quirke, *Ancient Egyptian Religion* (London: British Museum Press/Dover Publications Inc.; 1992), p. 142.

<sup>76</sup> Mercer, *The Religion of Ancient Egypt*, pp. 321, 323.

### (3) The Dead Drink: Evidence from Mesopotamia

In Israel, there is no evidence of continuing provision of a sort sometimes found in Mesopotamia, where unfed ghosts could be considered a serious problem. Nevertheless, we are reminded of the motif in some Mesopotamian literature, that the underworld is a place of dryness and thirst, where the dead may be weakened by lack of water.

As regards the concept of death and the afterlife in the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near East, scholars have said much.<sup>77</sup> There is a striking theme related to our discussion attested in the literary sources among the ancient Near Eastern people: the obligation of the living to provide the dead with nourishment and fluids. This section discusses elements of this theme found in the most classical of sources such as the Mesopotamian idea of *etemmu*. The ideas of these peoples might have been known by or influenced the Israelites in one way or another.

The Babylonian nether world is a world of shadows of the living. Ereshkigal and Nergal preside over this dark world. The Akhkharu, pale blood drinkers, are children of Ereshkigal and Nergal. The Akhkharu rule over these cities and the *etemmu* are their slaves. In the cosmology of the Atrahasis Epic,<sup>78</sup> Enlil put the lesser gods to farm the land and maintain the irrigation canals. After some time these

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<sup>77</sup>For other relevant works by scholars, see: Miranda Bayliss, 'The Cult of Dead King in Assyria and Babylonia', *Iraq* 35 (1973), pp. 115-125; S. G. F. Brandon, 'The Origin of Death in some Near Eastern Religions', *RelS* 1 (1966), pp. 217-228; B. S. Childs, 'Death and Dying In Old Testament Theology', in John H. Marks and Robert M. Good, eds., *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Marvin H. Pope* (Guilford, Conn: Four Quarters Publishing, 1987), pp. 89-92; Mircea Eliade, 'Mythologies of Death: An Introduction', in Frank E. Reynolds and Earle H. Waugh, eds., *Religious Encounters With Death* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1973), pp. 13-23; Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976); Theodore J. Lewis, *Cult of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989); Baruch Margalit, 'Death and Dying in the Ugaritic Epics', in Bendt Alister, ed., *Death in Mesopotamia* (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1980), pp. 243-254; Nico Van Uchelen, "Death and the Afterlife in the Hebrew Bible of Ancient Israel," in J. M. Bremer et al, eds., *Hidden Futures: Death and Immortality in Ancient Egypt, Anatolia, the Classical, Biblical and Arabic-Islamic World* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1994), pp. 77-90; Brian B. Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead: Ancestor Cult and Necromancy in Ancient Israelite Religion and Tradition* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1994), pp. 291-292; James B. Pritchard ed., *The Ancient Near East*, vol. 1: *An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), pp. 28-132.

<sup>78</sup> This epic is a story from Mesopotamia, probably composed as early as the nineteenth century B.C.E. It includes both a creation and a flood account. For the whole text of the Atrahasis Epic, see James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, (3d. ed. with Supplement; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 104-106; and for a more detailed information, see W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atrahasis* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969).



gods refused to continue working. Enki proposed that humans be created to take over the work. An undergod was slain and the goddess Mammi created humans by shaping clay mixed with saliva and the blood of the slain under-god.<sup>79</sup> Atrahasis myth suggests that the human being is then fused with the *etemmu*. The Babylonians saw a person separating into two constituents on death, that is, *esemtu*, which is the material corpse, and an immaterial spirit of the dead called *etemmu*. The *etemmu* lives on to pass into the underworld even when the *esemtu* is yet to be buried. The *etemmu* receives *kispu* sacrifices for the dead which living relatives offer to them.<sup>80</sup> Some *etemmu* are said to be weak while others are strong. It is believed strong *etemmu* may leave the underworld and return to the world of the living where they become evil spirits. Weaker *etemmu* remain in the underworld, eating dust and drinking stale water.

Both the myths of Atrahasis and Adapa point to the ancient Sumerian knowledge of the mortal state of humans. They were also certain about the immortality of the *etemmu* or spirit of the human. The life led by these *etemmu* was, however, not an enviable one. For the Sumerians the spirit of the human being lived after death but at best in a ghostly and dreary life in a miserable world.<sup>81</sup> The journey of this new life began after the funerary rites, when the shade began its journey to the nether world through the tomb to the Great Below.<sup>82</sup> In the nether world, designated the “place of no return”, House of Darkness, the House of Dust, the ghost-dwellers are clothed like birds, with wings for garments, dust is their fare and clay their food.<sup>83</sup> The following words of Ereshkigal, Queen of the nether world seem to reveal the nature of the *etemmu*’s source of nourishment: “Lo, should I drink water with Anunnaki? Should I eat clay for bread, drink muddied water for beer?”<sup>84</sup> However,

<sup>79</sup> In the creation epic *Enuma Elish*, Tablet VI, Ea kills Kingu and uses his blood to create human beings so that they can perform the menial tasks of the gods.

<sup>80</sup> The *kispu* offering was a funerary offering for dead ancestors.

<sup>81</sup> Jean Bottéro, *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods*, (Tr. Zainab Bahrani and Marc Van De Mieroop; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), n 12, p. 277.

<sup>82</sup> Bottéro, *Mesopotamia*, n 12, p. 230

<sup>83</sup> Akkadian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, tablet 7.3.34-39, in Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East* vol. 1, p. 87; The Descent of Ishtar to the Nether World, in *ANET*, pp. 106-109. See Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East* vol. 1., pp. 58-59, 80-81; Alfred Jeremias, *The Babylonian Conception of Heaven and Hell* (London, D. Nutt, 1902), pp. 14-15.

<sup>84</sup> ‘The Descent of Ishtar to the Nether World’ in *ANET*, 106-109. See Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East* vol. 1., pp. 30-39.

the mention of some serving meat roasts and pouring cool water from the waterskins in the nether world is an indication of some of the spirits faring better than others.<sup>85</sup> If the appropriate funerary rites were not offered; or even worse, if the body was not buried; the *etemmu* would remain upon the earth, roving aimlessly, forced to eat only the gutter scraps and dirty water it might happen upon.<sup>86</sup>

But then, why are there all these references to food and water in the ANET on the afterlife in the underworld if not that they bore a direct relationship to the sustenance of the dwellers of the nether world? Obviously, food and water funerary offerings were of great importance, and as such were an obligation of surviving friends and relatives.<sup>87</sup> Such offerings could bring sustenance to the *etemmu*, thereby making their form of life in the underworld more bearable. Countless gravesites uncovered in the region include containers in which food and water offerings were made to the dead, one significant example being the royal tomb of Pu-abī. Mortuary provisions found in Sumerian tombs indicate that probably, these ancient Near Eastern people imagined the dead as actually residing in their tomb and capable of receiving the offerings of food and drinks made to them as seen for example in the excavation of a lady by name Pu-abī in the Royal Cemetery at Ur dating to ca. 2600-2500 B.C.<sup>88</sup> Pu-abī, probably Queen of Ur, was buried lying on a wooden bier. She was buried along with many attendants, perhaps meant to serve her in the afterlife, and several Sumerian artefacts, including lapis lazuli, carnelian and several other objects.<sup>89</sup> The presence of such mortuary goods as gold and silver goblets, drinking-tubes or straws of lapis lazuli, and a five-liter silver jar, may indicate her allotment of drinks in the afterlife.

<sup>85</sup> See *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Tablet VII, iii. 40-49.

<sup>86</sup> Jeremias, *The Babylonian Conception of Heaven and Hell*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>87</sup> S. Langdon, 'Death and Disposal of the Dead: Babylonian', in *ERE* 4.444-446, discusses tomb provisioning including food and water.

<sup>88</sup> C.L. Woolley et al, *Ur Excavations, vol. II: The Royal Cemetery* (London, The British Museum Press, 1934), pp. 88, 563, plate 193. See also D.J. Wiseman, *Catalogue of the Western Asiatic seals in the British Museum: cylinder seals I, Uruk-Early Dynastic periods* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1962), plate 25b. A cuneiform inscription (written in Sumerian) on a Lapis lazuli cylinder seal, found on her body, identified her as 'The lady Pu-abī'.

<sup>89</sup> In the late 1920s, the British archaeologist C. Leonard Woolley uncovered these Mesopotamian treasures in a joint expedition by the British Museum and the University of Pennsylvania Museum. The royal tombs at Ur opened the world's eyes to the full glory of ancient Sumerian culture (2600-2500 BC) at its zenith.

Also significant is a Mesopotamian "banquet" scene as depicted on a lapis lazuli cylinder seal from Queen Pu-abi's tomb also points to ancient Mesopotamian belief the dependence of food and fluids in the afterlife. An impression of this seal depicts figures, male and female, on either side of a wide-mouthed jar who are shown imbibing probably barley beer through drinking tubes, while others below raise high their cups, perhaps containing wine, which is served from a spouted vessel. There is food on a stand. As was believed by the Egyptians in relation to the inscriptions on their tomb walls, this seal with its "banquet" scene was, perhaps, meant to be magically transformed in order to perpetually supply the daily allotment for the sustenance of Pu-abi and her attendants.

Obviously, inhumation of the dead body by the Mesopotamians prompts their belief that the dead lived in a world beneath the earth. The discussion above sheds light on Mesopotamian death beliefs in relations to the tendency of the dead, in the underworld, towards fluids and food. As in Mesopotamia, burial provisions in Israel, as elsewhere, point to the fact that the need for sustenance does not end with death – whatever life-force remains in the "spirit" still requires food and, especially, drink to be potent.

Rather separate from the general issue of provisions is a remarkable story in Homer, whose ideas about the afterlife probably corresponds broadly with concepts of Sheol and similarly found in the Near East.

#### **(4) Fluids and Life: Homeric Ideas**

That the shades in the world of the dead long for fluids, especially blood, in order that they may be revived temporarily is confirmed by the Homeric poems.<sup>90</sup> The imbibing of blood by the dead in the ancient Greek concept of the afterlife may also provide, to some extent, an introductory background for reconstructing Israelite

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<sup>90</sup> The punishment of Tantalos in the underworld is relevant to our discussion. It had to do with hunger and thirst in the immediate vicinity of food and drink. Tantalos was one of the three who are said to have offended against the gods and the cosmic order. He and other sinners (Sisyphos and Tityos) were punished in Hades. He stood up to his neck in a pool of water beneath a fruit tree with low branches. Whenever he bent down to get a drink in order to assuage his thirst, the water would recede, lowering itself away from his mouth; whenever he reached for the fruits (possibly for their juicy content), the tree branch would rise out of his reach and the wind moved them out of his reach. Thus, he was always hungry and thirsty (Odyssey 11:576-600). Also significant for our study is the fact that in Homer's *Il.* 23:218-220, "Achilles pours wine for his dead friend Patroklos". This reference also implies sustenance by means of fluid intake.

death belief and burial practice. Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, in her book, *Reading Greek Death*, argues that the Homeric texts were given their final form, the form in which we know them, in the eighth century BCE in Ionia.<sup>91</sup> These eighth century Homeric poems possibly preserve earlier traditions.

In Greek thought, the underworld was the home of the dead, and people believed it was located under the earth, in a place where the living were not allowed to go. In the *Iliad*, it is under the earth; in the *Odyssey*, it is an island to which Odysseus sails. Hades is dark and unpleasant, with huge entrances through which it is easy for the dead to enter, although Cerberus guards the exit. In Homer, the shades in Hades cannot cross over again and return to the “upper world” (Il. 23:75-76),<sup>92</sup> and only those who have died and are buried can cross from the upper world to Hades.

Odyssey 11<sup>93</sup> recounts Odysseus’ trip to the underworld and the sacrifice offered by Odysseus. It is the most ancient literary evidence we have on Greek beliefs on the afterlife. Odysseus who was alive entered Hades from the upper world with the help of Circe’s magic that could change the natural order of things.<sup>94</sup> What he found was not a happy place but a cold one, where the dead needed sustenance through the imbibing of fluids.<sup>95</sup> Odysseus met the spirits of the dead including Achilles (484 ff.) and notably, his own mother, Antikleia who had died after he left for Troy. Following the instructions provided by Circe, Odysseus arrives at Hades where he made a sacrifice of a ram and a black ewe. The blood attracted the dead souls out of Hades and eventually Teiresias arrived. After drinking some of the blood, Teiresias told Odysseus that he had dangers still to face and that when he

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<sup>91</sup> Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, *Reading Greek Death: to the end of the classical period* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 13. She further explains that these two final-version poems (*Iliad* and *Odyssey*) are products of the same cultural environment. Like Sourvinou-Inwood, I shall be referring to the author(s) of these poems as Homer. There have long been suggestions of different authors for the poems, but that is not an issue, which need concern us here.

<sup>92</sup> Childs notes a similarity between the מַשְׁכָּנִים in the Old Testament and the shades of Hades in Homer. B. S. Childs, ‘Death and Dying in the Old Testament’, *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East*, (Guildford, Connecticut: Four Quarters Publishing, 1987), pp. 89-91.

<sup>93</sup> Also called the *Nekuia* (“Book of the Dead”). It is the most ancient literary evidence we have on Greek beliefs on the afterlife.

<sup>94</sup> Sourvinou-Inwood, *Reading Greek Death*, 63. Sourvinou-Inwood argues that whether he actually entered Hades proper is left open.

<sup>95</sup> The phantom image of the great hero Achilles told Odysseus that he would rather be a poor serf on earth than lord of all the dead in the Underworld (*Odyssey*, 11:489–91). “Do not speak to me soothingly about death, Odysseus; I should prefer as a slave to serve another man, even if he had no property and little to live on, than to rule over all these dead who have done with life”.

arrived at Ithaca, he would be unknown and friendless. In order to live out a life of tranquillity, he would need to appease Poseidon. The blood Antikleia drank helped her to recognize Odysseus and in the ensuing conversation she told him how his family was longing for his return and how she herself “pined away” until she died of loneliness for him. Odysseus could not embrace his mother’s shade because it was immaterial (11:204-208).

In the *Odyssey* the dead are witless shades, unable to do anything. They could however speak after drinking the blood of the animal that Odysseus sacrificed to them. But the *Odyssey* does not imply that all the shades are witless for Achilles appears to be fully himself mentally and articulate.<sup>96</sup> The explanation for the *Odyssey*’s silence here may be that perhaps it is a simple matter of narrative convenience, but it may also be that Achilles has died more recently and so is less “far gone”, even than Antikleia who needed to drink the blood in order to recognize her son. Whichever way we may look at it, the suggestion still remains that though the notion that by the drinking of blood the shades temporarily regained their faculties is a sufficient substance of the *Odyssey*,<sup>97</sup> a careful reading of *Odyssey* 11 suggests that it is not always that the shades needed to drink blood before they could recognize Odysseus and verbally communicate with him.

The Homeric narrative shows more than simple provision: the dead can be restored to something like their living character by being fed blood for which they have a considerable thirst. Where grave provisions reflect an idea that death can itself be a variable state, in which the dead can still benefit from physical substance, the story in Homer shows that, in ancient Greek belief at least, the provision of blood can actually draw a person back from the weakened state typical of the dead, towards the condition of the living – blood is, in some degree, a cure for death. It would be a mistake to transfer this idea to an Israelite context without qualification – we cannot even be certain that it was typical of early Greek beliefs. However, this sheds light on another aspect of Israelite burial practices – ossilegium.

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<sup>96</sup> See Sourvinou-Inwood, *Reading Greek Death*, p. 83.

<sup>97</sup> See *Odyssey* 11:153.

#### IV. Death as Loss of Fluids: Evidence from Ossilegium

The idea of death in relation to dry bones as opposed to moisture being life has been overlooked in Biblical scholarship. Yet understanding this relationship between death and the dry body helps a great deal in understanding how the Israelites conceptualised fluids in relation to life. To analyse dryness and death of the body in the OT is, as it were, to analyse its wetness/moisture and life. Besides, very little attention has been given to the discussion of the dry and dusty environment of Sheol in relation to death. This section explores the context in which death can be understood in terms of the desiccation of the body.

To understand the physiology of life, we can look at physiology of death. The survival of the body after death appears very important to the Israelite. In addition to this, the OT evidence for death includes the dryness of bones, that is, complete loss of bodily fluids. In this section of the chapter, my interest is in attempting to explore the question of how far the concept of dryness and death ties in with the idea of moisture connoting life. Such a question makes the discussion of ossilegium very relevant. The “ossilegium” or “secondary burial” refers to the practice of reburying the desiccated and denuded bones of the dead. It is removal and gathering of the bones of previous interment, and relocating them in another tomb, or in a receptacle, for subsequent burial.<sup>98</sup> The important question here is whether the Jewish practice of ossilegium indicates that there was an association between bodily fluids and life. Does archaeological evidence for burial, especially the practice of secondary reburial elsewhere, tie in with ideas of dryness meaning death?

The significance of the dry bones, symbolizing the finality of death, suggests an understanding of the process of corpse decomposition as a process of “still dying”, a state of some form of “partial life”. Thus it takes time to die just as it takes time for the bones to completely lose moisture or wetness. This is what ossilegium, as

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<sup>98</sup> Pau Figueras, ‘Jewish Ossuaries and Secondary Burial: Their Significance for Early Christianity’, *Immanuel* 19 (1984/85), pp. 41-57; Byron R. McCane, ‘Let the Dead Bury their Own Dead’: Secondary Burial and Matthew 8:21-22’, *HTR* (1990), pp. 31-43. For a survey of the practice of ossilegium see Eric M. Meyers, *Jewish Ossuaries: Reburial and Rebirth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1971), pp. 3-11.

practices among the Jews and elsewhere, basically points to: the notion that moisture is life, as implied by the common notion that “dry bones” are indicative of complete death. In this section I will discuss the Israelite/Jewish secondary burial practice. Then I shall consider the various interpretations of the phenomenon of death in relation to the decay of the corpse in the “wet” phase and the completion of death in the “dry” phase as described by Robert Hertz in his analysis of secondary burials. The point regarding Hertz’s ideas is to make it clear that the ossilegium is a global phenomenon and will also provide an analogy for understanding the Jewish practice in terms of wetness/dryness.

### (1) Jewish Practice of Ossilegium: Literary Evidence

To begin with, the Jewish funerary practice is worth mentioning here.<sup>99</sup> Jewish funerals almost always took place the same day as the death.<sup>100</sup> The eyes and mouth of the deceased were closed (Gen 46:4), the corpse was washed with perfumes and ointments, its bodily orifices were stopped up, strips of cloth were wrapped tightly around the body, the jaw was shut, the arms were fixed to the sides, and the feet tied together. Once prepared, the corpse was placed on a bier or in a coffin and carried out of town in a procession to the family tomb, usually a small rock-cut cave entered through a narrow opening that could be closed with a stone slab. After eulogies, the corpse was placed either in a niche or on a shelf, along with items of jewellery or other personal effects owned by the deceased. Sometimes monuments were erected over tombs; a monument on a tomb was probably intended to serve as זִכָּרוֹן (memorial) for the family member(s) buried below.<sup>101</sup>

In Jewish burial custom the corpse was left in the sepulchre or a rock-hewn tomb for sometime until the flesh decomposes and the body is completely reduced to

<sup>99</sup> See Byron R. McCane, ‘The Scandal of the Grave’, *Christian History* 17 (1998), p. 41.

<sup>100</sup> However, among many other peoples, as among the Greeks, a few days are allowed to elapse before the initial burial. They waited three days after the death, before burying them. They placed various types of food near the corpse in the tomb at the time of burial. See Donna Kurtz, *Greek Burial Customs* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1971), p. 145. The need to bury the corpse quickly was imperative as expressed by Deut 21:23 where “on that day” means the day of death. However, in Jewish practice, the tomb used to be left open for three days to ensure that the person has actually died. See Kaufmann Kohler, ‘Burial’, *JEnc* 3.432-437.

<sup>101</sup> Kraemer, *The Meaning of Death in Rabbinic Judaism*, 35, makes reference to the tomb – called זִכָּרוֹן which may be built over the grave.

a skeleton. The dry state of the body meant final accomplishment of death. Denuded and desiccated bones from earlier burials are then removed from the caves and kept in special receptacles called ossuaries, or stored along with all the other bones in a special bone cavern nearby.<sup>102</sup> Thus, the ossuaries become the final resting place for the gathered bones.<sup>103</sup> This Jewish practice of ossilegium was described by the ancient Mishnaic expression *לקרט עצמות* (lit., “gathering of the bones”).

Evidence from rabbinic literature supports the idea that ossilegium used to be a typical Jewish form of interment.<sup>104</sup> It is obvious that the practice of ossilegium may have resulted in a revolution of Jewish beliefs concerning “life” beyond this life and the plight of the departed, which required atonement.<sup>105</sup> In Talmudic times, the Jewish practice involved the reburial of the bones about a year following death and initial burial.<sup>106</sup>

In his book, *The Meaning of Death in Rabbinic Judaism*, David Kraemer explores the Jewish practice of ossilegium. The Rabbis accepted the practice of secondary treatment of the dead.<sup>107</sup> Some references to burial in Rabbinic literature confirm the Jewish practice of Ossilegium, a typical example being, *Semaḥot* 12:7 which states that “bones are not collected until the flesh was completely decomposed, the bones were gathered and buried in their proper place”.<sup>108</sup>

Kraemer observes that the remains of tombs show that secondary burial of the bones of the dead, following the decomposition of the flesh, was a Jewish death-practice. Kraemer notes that ossilegium has been described as a “Jerusalem

<sup>102</sup> Jon Davies, *Death, Burial and Rebirth in the Religions of Antiquity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 74.

<sup>103</sup> Eli Davis, ‘Likkut Azamot’, *EncJud.*, 11.238-239; Pau Figueras, ‘Jewish Ossuaries and Secondary Burial: Their Significance for Early Christianity’, p. 41-57; See also *sem.* 12.

<sup>104</sup> For further information on this see, P. Figueras, *Decorated Jewish Ossuaries* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1983); R. Hachlili and A. Killebrew, ‘Jewish Funerary Customs during the Second Temple Period, in the Light of the Excavations at the Jericho Necropolis’, *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 115 (1983), p. 109-132; L. Y. Rahmani, ‘Jewish Rock-Cut Tombs in Jerusalem’, *Atiqot* (English Series) 3 (1961), pp. 93-120.

<sup>105</sup> Figueras is of a similar view. See P. Figueras, ‘Jewish Ossuaries and Secondary Burial’, p. 41-57.

<sup>106</sup> See Eli Davis, ‘Burial’, *EncJud.*, 4.1515-1523; Rahmani, ‘Jewish Rock-Cut Tombs in Jerusalem’, *Atiqot*, pp. 93-120. According to the Talmud, during the first twelve months after death, the soul remains in contact with the decomposing body (Tal. Bab. *Shab* 152b-153a).

<sup>107</sup> Kraemer, *The Meaning of Death in Rabbinic Judaism*, p. 34.

<sup>108</sup> *Semaḥot* 12:7 is a post-Talmudic text. Meyers argues that the fact that secondary burial continued in various forms until the fourth century A.D. is a strong indication that *Semaḥot* is a reliable ancient source. See Eric M. Meyer, *Jewish Ossuaries: Reburial and Rebirth* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1971), p. 74.



custom.”<sup>109</sup> It was a common burial practice in the surroundings of Jerusalem before the destruction of the Temple. But why and when the practice was abandoned is difficult to tell. The popular suggestion is that ossilegium as a burial custom seems to have been abandoned in the environs of Jerusalem following the Jewish revolt under Bar-Kokhba when Hadrian stopped the Jews from living in Aelia Capitolina. After the defeat of Bar Kokhba, some Jews who could no longer make their home in Judah came to Galilee bringing with them the practice of ossilegium.<sup>110</sup> Jews in the North continued with the practice of reburial, along with other burial practices, until about the mid-fourth century.

In OT thought, long life meant delaying the descent into Sheol and this suggests an early Hebrew concept of the after-life in which all end up in Sheol, and in which there is no life beyond.<sup>111</sup> However the later practice of secondary burial among the Jews suggests a change in the concept of the afterlife among the people of Israel. What the OT seems to be clear about is a concept of an after-life in which the idea of “joining one’s ancestor” is very significant.<sup>112</sup> On the one hand, as already discussed, the Israelites found cremation of the dead body unacceptable because it destroyed the body, on the other hand it was dreadful and humiliating to be denied burial. It was a curse for one’s carcass to be food for the birds of the air, and the beasts of the earth (Deut 28:26; 1 Sam 17:44, 46; 1 Kgs 14:11). The corpse must therefore not lie unburied for a long time.<sup>113</sup> We see in the OT, a great value assigned to proper interment, especially burial in the family tomb (Gen 47:29-30; 49:29; 50:25; 2 Sam 21:12-14). Such expressions as “to be gathered to one’s people or kin” (Gen 25:8; 35:29; 49:33; Judg 2:10) and “to sleep with one’s fathers” (1 Kgs 1:21) were expressions of what death meant to the Israelites and convey the ancient Israelite

<sup>109</sup> Kraemer, *The Meaning of Death in Rabbinic Judaism*, p. 51.

<sup>110</sup> Kraemer, *The Meaning of Death in Rabbinic Judaism*, p. 51.

<sup>111</sup> The reward for obeying God’s commandments is this-worldly long life as also expressed in Deuteronomy: “See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity . . . and observing his commandments . . . you shall live and become numerous” (Deut 30:15-20). The Psalter also has: “With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation” (Ps 91:16). Therefore, the fact must not be ignored that the ancient Israelites rarely dwelt on the afterlife. They emphasized the present life. Their soteriology focused on this-worldly deliverance of their nation from its enemies.

<sup>112</sup> The best kind of death was one of old age, then buried by sons to return to the ancestors as indicated by the reference: “This is the length of Abraham’s life . . . died in good old age . . . and was gathered to his people” (Gen 25:8).

<sup>113</sup> According to Josephus, it was forbidden to let a corpse lie unburied: “not to let any one lie unburied” (Josephus, *AgAp.*, 2.211).

practice of secondary burial. It was necessary to gather the bones of the dead and place them together with those of the dead relatives. It is in this sense that Sheol is understood as the family tomb of Israel.<sup>114</sup> Thus, in life and in death the family bond must be preserved.

## (2) Jewish Practice of Ossilegium: Archaeological Evidence

A gleaning of OT references to Hebrew burial practices shows that there seems to be no specific reference to secondary treatment (ossilegium) in ancient Israel. However, this must not lead to the assumption that the OT records alone provide identification for a general Hebrew conception of death. Archaeological evidence abundantly supports the practice of reburial in ancient Israel/Judah.

Archaeological discoveries have ignited in the modern scholar an appreciation of the OT references and rabbinic texts regarding the Jewish practice of secondary burial. Greenhut's analysis of the tombs of Palestine points to the practice of primary and secondary burial.<sup>115</sup> Secondary burial was first practised in Jerusalem but later become widespread.<sup>116</sup>

Archaeological discoveries furnish us with evidence for the ancient Israelite/Judahite practice of secondary burial. There were various forms of this burial practice. One example involved simply laying the bony remains in the tomb. Cave tombs were among the Iron Age burial types used for both primary inhumation and secondary deposition. An example of a cave tomb is Lachish 233, which J. Abercrombie cited as the most conclusive evidence in favour of secondary burial. In this tomb, the skeleton was missing arm and chest bones, with the skull placed in the

<sup>114</sup> Eric M. Meyers, 'The Theological Implications of an Ancient Jewish Burial Custom', in *JQR* 52 (1971-72), pp. 95-132.

<sup>115</sup> Z. Greenhut, 'Early Bronze Age IV Tombs and Burials in Palestine,' *Journal of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University* 22 (1995), pp. 3-46.

<sup>116</sup> L. Y. Rahmani, 'Ancient Jerusalem's Funerary Customs and Tombs', pp. 43-53, 109-19. Dating the secondary burial practice among the Jews is debatable. Kraemer, *The Meaning of Death in Rabbinic Judaism*, p. 141, suggests this custom was no more practised by the mid-fourth century in Palestine. See also Rachel Hachlili, 'Burials', pp. 785-94. Hachlili notes that excavations in the extended Jerusalem necropolis and the Jericho cemetery reveal both primary and secondary burial customs. She dates the primary burial custom in which the individual is buried in a wooden coffin, to about mid-1st Century B.C.E.-10 C.E., while secondary burials in ossuaries followed, dating to about 10 - 68 C.E.

pelvis.<sup>117</sup> Bloch-Smith observes that Lachish tomb 223 was cut in the Middle or Late Bronze Age and reused for burial during the seventh century BCE.<sup>118</sup> Another example was ossuary burial. Evidence of the practice of secondary treatment can be gathered from the presence of small stone ossuaries almost always found in tombs.<sup>119</sup> Ossuaries (boxes for the placement of bones after the flesh of the deceased has decayed) were inserted in some of the niches (holes dug straight into the walls). Excavations of Jewish tombs around Jerusalem have yielded several hundred ossuaries.

The large number of burial sites and tombs in Jerusalem dating from the Second Temple period (second century BCE - first century CE), have been the subject of intensive and continuing investigation. Hundreds of tombs were hewn into the slopes of the hills surrounding the city, mainly on the Mount of Olives and Mount Scopus. The burial caves were in continuous use for several generations by members of the same family. Simple tombs have a narrow opening, sealed with a square stone. The most typical feature of the Jewish tombs of that period is the stone chests with lids (ossuaries).<sup>120</sup> The presence of ossuaries attest to the prevalent practice of collecting the bones of the deceased for secondary burial,<sup>121</sup> a custom based on the Jewish belief in the resurrection of the dead.

<sup>117</sup> J. Abercrombie, 'Palestinian Burial Practices from 1200 to 600 BCE'. PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1979, pp. 41-42.

<sup>118</sup> Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, p. 227.

<sup>119</sup> The Jewish ossuaries display different ornamental motifs, including stylised plants and floral forms, crosses, rosettes and various architectonic elements. However, it may not be misleading to interpret the various ossuary ornaments as mere decorations rather than imbuing them with religious connotations and symbolisms. Also appearing on ossuaries are personal names written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek inscriptions. See an illustration of this in Figueras, "Jewish Ossuaries and Secondary Burial", p. 48. In this figure the inscription in Greek reads: ΙΟΥΔΑΤΟΣ ΛΑΓΑΝΙΩΝΟΣ ΠΡΟΣΕΛΥΤΟΥ, which refers to "the Proselyte Judah Son of Laganion" indicating that the content of the ossuary are the dead person's own bones. Arguing that the onomastic correspondence between ossuary inscriptions and the NT names may be understood as casual, P. Figuera notes, "both groups belong to the same chronological and regional context". He therefore infers that it is natural that Jewish-Christians in the Jerusalem area might have practised ossilegium. See Figueras, "Jewish Ossuaries and Secondary Burial", p. 48.

<sup>120</sup> In the ossilegium of corpses, there was the practice whereby the bones were gathered and placed on sheets inside the tomb (*Sem.* 12:8, 9). But Rabbi Akiba gives preference to the use of ossuaries: "In the course of time, the sheets will waste away; in the cause of time, the bones will intermingle. Let them rather be gathered and placed in ossuaries" (*Sem.* 12:7). Rabbi Akiba's comment was specifically in relation to ossilegium involving the bones of two corpses at the same time.

<sup>121</sup> The Funerary Inscription of King Uzziah was found in the collection of the Russian Convent on the Mount of Olives, but there is no record of the place from which it was removed (Jerusalem-Burial Sites and Tombs of the Second Temple Period, by American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, 2002,

The excavation of the Jewish necropolis of Herodian Jericho points to the date 10 C.E. for the earliest use of ossuaries in that region.<sup>122</sup> The presence of Jewish ossuaries of the first century points to the practice of ossilegium in that century. According to Figuera, “thorough research into contemporary literary descriptions of afterlife has convinced us all that vases, plants, flowers and architectonic elements representing sumptuous entrances decorating the ossuaries did relate to the happy afterlife that people wished for their dead”.<sup>123</sup> However, in my opinion, besides whatever religious implications there may be for the artistic motifs decorating the ossuary, the bony relics, which form the content, must rather be the focus of our attention rather than the receptacle (ossuary). Though the dry bones represent the finality of death, they also represented for those Jews who practised ossilegium, the promise of a happy afterlife for the deceased and more so, gladness of the hearts of the surviving loved ones.<sup>124</sup>

### (3) The Process of Death: Hertz on Indonesian Reburial Rites

In this section I will briefly discuss the Indonesian practice as reported in the works of Robert Hertz, a leading theorist on secondary burials.<sup>125</sup> I will principally direct the focus towards the vital implications of the wetness and dryness of the body and bones

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<http://www.us-israel.org/jsource>). The Aramaic inscription is incised on a stone tablet (35 x 34 cm.) and the style of the script dates it to the latter part of the Second Temple period. It tells of the reburial of the remains of Uzziah, King of Judah (769-733 BCE): “Hither were brought the bones of Uzziah King of Judah and do not open”. The Bible recounts King Uzziah's deeds and conquests and also describes his burial: “Uzziah rested with his fathers in the burial field of the kings, because, they said, he is a leper” (2 Chr 26:3). King Uzziah was obviously not buried in the royal tombs within the City of David. Josephus wrote, “he was buried alone in his garden” (*Ant.* 9:10, 4). The necessity to remove the bones of Uzziah from their original burial place was probably connected with the expansion of the city during Herod's reign. However, it must be noted that the expression לקוט עצמות was applied not only to ossilegium with all the moral implications associated with it, but also the gathering and burial of human bones by reason of relocation of the remains from outside into the burial place ancestors without any moral connotations of atonement. The references to bone-gathering in the OT such as those of Jacob, Joseph, etc., and the case of King Uzziah described above belong to the latter. It will therefore be erroneous to suggest that the examples of bone-gathering and reburial in the OT were examples of ossilegium as understood and practised in Judaism.

<sup>122</sup> Figueras, ‘Jewish Ossuaries and Secondary Burial’, p. 47.

<sup>123</sup> Figueras, ‘Jewish Ossuaries and Secondary Burial’, p. 55.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. Figueras, ‘Jewish Ossuaries and Secondary Burial’, p. 56, where Figuera notes: “The link between secondary burial and the belief in individual resurrection is not established by any source, but may be the best explanation for the appearance of individual gathering of bones in Jewish tombs”.

<sup>125</sup> Robert Hertz, ‘A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death’ in *Death and the Right Hand* (tr. R. Needham & C. Needham from French, 1909; Glencoe: Free Press, 1960), pp. 27-86.

of the deceased. This example of the practice of secondary burial today will inform our understanding of the Jewish practice and the practice as it prevails in other modern cultures.<sup>126</sup>

Robert Hertz focused his analysis of reburial practices on pre-literate Indonesian funerary and burial rites,<sup>127</sup> and his theory of secondary burial distinguishes the corpse in its initial fleshy form from its final fleshless bones. He saw the death-rites of the culture he studied as involving two phases: The initial phase dealt with the deceased's body shortly following what we may describe as biological death. Hertz describes the initial rites as the "wet" medium of the body. The second and final rites related to the bony remains following complete decomposition of the flesh, and this he describes as the "dry" medium of the body. Different funerary rites are performed for each of these phases undergone by the dead body. From this, Hertz saw their concept of death as a process: "Death is not complete in an instantaneous act...it involves a lasting procedure...which is terminated only when the dissolution of the body has been completed."<sup>128</sup>

In the thought of these Indonesians, when people die they enter into a phase of decay at the end of which they join their ancestors. The dry skeleton marks the end of decay. During the period of decay the deceased is said to be in a wet condition because of the fluid draining from the body. The period of decay is problematic for the deceased as it is said to be on the margins of human life – a state in which it belongs neither to the living nor the dead. During the wet phase the deceased is said to be lonely and isolated. The wet phase ends with the dry condition of the bones. The end of decay and wetness ushers in a new rite in which the dry remains are placed in a cave or storage alongside those of other dead persons. For Hertz, this process of shifting from a condition of wetness to one of dryness also represents a shift in the

<sup>126</sup> L. M. Danforth, *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 56. The analysis of Hertz inevitably provides a basis for interpreting a contemporary Greek Christian example of ossilegium. The secondary burial rites as practised in Potamia, a contemporary Greek village, has been described by Loring M. Danforth and Alexander Tsiaras in their book, *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece*. Danforth observes that the rites in Potamia are quite similar to those performed in other rural areas of Greece, though with a certain degree of variations. Potamia's is a contemporary example of the double nature of burial practiced in the context of Greek Orthodox life.

<sup>127</sup> A practice almost similar to the Indonesian practice of secondary burial is found in Ecuador. For more information on this, see B. T. Arriaza, *Beyond Death: The Chinchorro Mummies of Ancient Chile* (Washington DC: Smithsonian University Press, 1995), p. 54.

<sup>128</sup> Hertz, 'A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death', pp. 27-86.

status of the deceased from the realm of the living to that of the dead ancestors.<sup>129</sup> Thus the dry phase marks the end of loneliness and isolation, but begins a new stage of incorporation into the “life” of other deceased kinfolds. The transformation of the corpse into skeletal remains is analogous to, borrowing the words of Douglas J. Davies, “transforming the identity of the dead into ancestral identities”.<sup>130</sup>

In most societies which practise secondary burial, there may also be a belief that the soul does not reach its final destination immediately after death, but waits until the time when the final burial takes place. The idea that after death the soul remains with the body till decomposition is complete suggests that the invisible soul disappears with the disappearance of the visible flesh. According to the Ainu, “death is not a matter of a moment”, so long as the decomposition is not ended, life and soul subsist to some extent inside or near the tomb. “The soul frees itself gradually from its earthly tabernacle” and one must be careful to leave it alone during all this time.<sup>131</sup> Both the notion that the soul takes time to free itself from the decomposing body, and that the dryness of the body marks the finality of death, suggests a conception that there is life as long as the body is moist. It is possible that the same notion underlies the Jewish practice of ossilegium.

Hertz’s analysis of secondary burial informs the Jewish practice of ossilegium and how it helps in physiologically interpreting this funeral practice in terms of fluids and the body. Decay is a mark of death. As Kaiser and Lohse rightly put it, “the lifeless body of the deceased one cannot be held back from decay.”<sup>132</sup> Biologically, the corpse goes through several stages of decomposition. Therefore, in one sense, it can be said that when the flesh and the נֶפֶשׁ (blood/breath) are separated, decomposition is initiated. This justifies the notion that blood and the soul or breath are the life of the flesh. A decaying body is a wet body because decomposition is associated with the loss of fluids. If death is said to be incomplete until

<sup>129</sup> Hertz, ‘A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death’, pp. 27-86.

See also Danforth, *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece*, p. 61.

Danforth observes, concerning the Potamian example, that the end of the liminal period indicates that the deceased has finally left his or her relatives in this world and cleaved to the ancestors: physically in the ossuary and spiritually in paradise.

<sup>130</sup> Douglas J. Davies, *Death, Ritual and Belief* (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 27.

<sup>131</sup> Hertz, ‘A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death’, pp. 27-86.

<sup>132</sup> Otto Kaiser and Eduard Lohse, *Death and Life* (tr. J. E. Steely; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), p. 31.

decomposition is complete, then there is a sense in which the decomposing body indicating “not totally dead,” also means, “being still alive”. We may see the wet phase as characterized by two stages: the preliminary stage of death and the liminal stage. In both stages the bones are wet, which is an indication of an ongoing process of death, that is, some form of life is still being experienced by the deceased. In the preliminary stage, which is the moment of biological death, the bones are wet in a body full of various kinds of fluids. Where death was caused by bloodshed, the discharge of blood as life-fluid leading to the death is evident.

The end of the decomposition of the body comes with the appearance of fleshless bones and the complete loss of fluids. This marks the end of the wet phase. The dry clean bones indicate the arrival of the dry phase, which is the final stage of death. At this stage the all the fluid in the body is gone together with the once solid flesh. All that is left of the personality of the dead, in the physical sense, are naked and dry bones.

The dry phase, as proposed by Hertz, is characterized by interment.<sup>133</sup> Secondary treatment, which comes with the exhumation, is a final and permanent separation of the dead from the living. The practice of exhumation of the remains of the dead is a rite of secondary burial, which marks the close of the liminal period.

The Jewish belief that death is a process rather than a moment forms the basis for their practice of the secondary burial of the bones of the dead. In this belief, it takes time to die. Death begins with the moment that breathing ceases (or blood is shed), continues through a period of decomposition during which body fluids are lost, and ends when the bones are left – bare and dry.

In summing up, we have discussed the fact that death is usually understood biologically, that is, as the final cessation of the vital functions of human beings, animals and plants. Thus, being dead is being in a state without animation or activity, without consciousness and with loss of sensation and vitality. But the belief of those who practise the rites of secondary burial goes beyond such a description of death as mentioned above. The practice of secondary treatment of the dead provides justification for the notion that death is a process. Death finally takes place with the complete dissolution of the moistened soft corruptible parts of the body (flesh) and

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<sup>133</sup> Hertz, ‘A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death’, pp. 27-86.

the drying up of the body. The implication here is that the denudation and desiccation of the hard bony parts of the body mark the end of the wetness of the body and therefore its life.

Physically, what is eventually left of the body in the grave is the skeleton. The bones of the deceased are its physical representation and the gathering and integration of these bones in the tomb of the ancestors becomes crucial in the death beliefs and burial practices of the Jews. The rationale behind their belief and practice is one of identity as one finds it a noble thing to remain part of his/her own tribe and family in life and in death. Presumably, without a concept of a conscious afterlife in place, the belief and the practice of ossilegium would be meaningless.<sup>134</sup> It seems the same concept of a conscious afterlife forms the rationale for the presence of mortuary assemblages, including liquid containers, in some Israelite/Judahite tombs.

Secondary reburial surely suggests a view of death as a process. It has already been noted that, in literary sources, the sick can be viewed as entering into the process of dying. Reburial shows that this process continues after the point at which we would normally consider the individual to be dead – they are only “dead enough” to be buried when the body is desiccated and skeletonised.

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<sup>134</sup> Whilst it might seem that the concept of a conscious afterlife would be needed to support the belief and practice of ossilegium, it should be observed that the Sadducees, a Jewish priestly and aristocratic sect, denied the afterlife. In the *Antiquities*, Josephus admits that the Sadducees held that the soul perished along with the body at death (Jos. *Ant.* 18 § 16-17). They did not believe that a person suffered punishment and received rewards after death. For other references to the Sadducees' denial of the doctrine of the resurrection, see Matt 22:23; Mark 12:18; Luk 20:27; Acts 4:1-2; 23:8. The Sadducees flourished from 1st century BCE until 1st century CE. Meyer observes that the heyday of Jewish ossuaries was from the first century B.C. to 135 A.D. and that secondary burials indeed continued at Beth She'arim in various forms until the fourth century A.D. See Meyer, *Jewish Ossuaries: Reburial and Rebirth*, p. 74. This fact indicates that the Sadducees were aware of the practice of ossilegium. However, it will be an oversimplification to suggest that this burial custom does not reflect the Sadducean community, which denied resurrection. In making a similar argument for the custom of Jewish ossuaries, Meyer again points out the argument that the ossuary burials were used by Sadducees who denied resurrection. See Meyer, *Jewish Ossuaries*, p. 74. One can argue that if the Sadducees practiced ossilegium, then it would be for some other explanations than my argument that only a belief in the afterlife could have made this solemn and meritorious handling and interment of the bones meaningful. One of such could be the Israelite belief that after death the members of a family must remain together as they were in life, an indication of a desire to be in a common resting place, especially, in the case where the skeletal remains of several individuals are gathered into a single receptacle. Josephus also refers to the Pharisees, who unlike the Sadducees, believed that “... souls have deathless vigour” and also the virtuous “...will have power to revive and live again ....” (*Ant* 18 § 3). Thus, Jewish ossilegium might have been a custom of the Pharisees who believed in life beyond the grave.



## V. Concluding Summary

In the foregoing pages, I have been concerned with the fact that in Israelite thought, there is a correlation between dryness and death as well as wetness and life. The primary goal of this chapter has been to discover, from Israelite thinking and practice, the basis upon which the wetness of the body can be associated with life. To achieve this goal, I have examined the topic under three major sections. In the first section, I have surveyed the death beliefs and practices in the OT, indicating the lack of interest on the part of the OT in discussing the afterlife.

Second, the argument of the section on Judahite mortuary provision is that there is also an extent to which the presence of liquid vessels in the tombs indicates that the Israelite concept of the afterlife is a possibility that cannot be underestimated. Therefore, just as we must not be quick in rejecting the cultic interpretation of this funerary practice, so must we be slow and careful not to discount the argument that the tomb assemblages were also provided to support the notion of the survivors regarding the need to sustain the “living-dead” by providing for their well-being in the afterlife. One conclusion that can be drawn from this is that the grave goods and inscriptions are of great significance in expressing the relation of the living to the dead in the survivors’ system of death belief. So what can the drink vessels in the Judahite tombs tell us about Israel’s death beliefs? Our study suggests a great distance between the Hebrew textual notions about death and the popular beliefs and practices about death. There are those who interpret the food provided as a having a cultic function, an example being the offering of food to the deified dead.<sup>135</sup> However, the tomb remains in Palestine from much earlier centuries, suggest that the theme of “fluids and life” underlies their ideas. As expressed in the present chapter, the predominance of liquid containers among the mortuary repertoire leads us to the conclusion that drinking was of paramount importance in a person’s post-mortem existence in the afterlife.

Thus, I have shown in this chapter, that both the biblical texts and the physical remains of burial support the reconstruction of Judahite and Israelite notions about the

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<sup>135</sup> This can be supported by the Old Testament reference to זָבַחַי־מֵתִים, “sacrifices to the dead”. See also Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, pp. 122-126.

feeding of the dead and sustaining them with fluids. The ancient Israelites generally contemplated a shady existence of the dead (עֲרֵפָה) in a nether world called Sheol. Undoubtedly, one convincing explanation for the presence of vessels among the grave goods is that it was a method of providing nourishment for the עֲרֵפָה, which the Israelites imagined as possessing the thirst of human beings. The evidence we have so far, regarding the provision of drink offerings to the dead in particular, indicates a sustained use of human faculties by the shades in the afterlife. A notion such as this requires of the dead-עֲרֵפָה an ability to take in fluids for the benefit of its life-sustaining power. 1) It assumes the netherworld is a place where life could be sustained by the intake of fluids; 2) it assumes that, though dry bones may represent complete death, the עֲרֵפָה, an immaterial part of the departed is a form of life capable of being sustained by fluids and moisture, according to Israelite popular belief.

I believe that it is rather helpful to emphasize that despite the uncertainty of our speculation regarding this issue, there are one or two of several intelligent guesses and deductions from the funerary practice of mortuary provisions placed in tombs by the Israelites and among this may be the notion that the dead, like the living, continue in a form of existence in which they still have basic experience of thirst, hunger and other needs for sustenance. If this is true, then the dead who cannot provide for themselves must depend on the living to provide, perhaps continuously, for their well-being in the afterlife.<sup>136</sup>

Third, I pursued my discussion on the practice of secondary burial as it prevails among the Jews. Hertz's theory of secondary burial helps us interpret ossilegium as practices among the ancient Jews. The fundamental belief in connection with ossilegium wherever it is practised is, that "dry bones" means complete death. In the context of ossilegium, the dryness of the bones also has multiple representations: (1) It signals finality of death and hopelessness (no possible return to life); (2) it marks the arrival of the dead at its destination, which comprises the physical incorporation of the bones with the ancestors in burial and the arrival of the soul at paradise; (3) and more significant for this discussion, the dryness of the bones means the absence of body fluids and life. Our study in this chapter has shown

<sup>136</sup> cf. Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead*, pp. 4-13, 274-281.

that death is an irreversible process in which one may become less dead, dead and eventually more dead. The Jewish burial practice of ossilegium, which is also prevalent in some other cultures, shows that one is “more dead” in the state of dry bones. Just as one can become drier, one can become more lifeless. Thus practice of ossilegium sheds light on the understanding of the significance of fluids in relation to the life of the body.

All this argument above reinforces my primary theme that sees a connection between body fluids and life. I must however note that, I reach my conclusions bearing in mind Pitard’s call to label speculation clearly when moving beyond the evidence.<sup>137</sup>

Overall, then, we can see in Israelite practices an attitude to vitality, which is very different from modern ideas. There is a process of sickness/injury, which leads to unconsciousness, cessation of breathing, and eventually, decomposition and “skeletonisation”. At this point, the dead person, now completely dead, is buried and descends into the “Ur-Grave” of Sheol, but may require provisions there, probably, in order to avoid reduction to a state of complete weakness. Liquid and bodily moisture are closely connected to this – and in Homer, blood has a special role.

This idea of progressive death, associated with dryness, is nowhere outlined explicitly in the OT, but it forms the basis for much poetic metaphor. The next chapter examines the view supporting the close association between dryness and death as shown by the use of plant imagery, by the use of the imagery of dry bones elsewhere in the OT and the physiological significance of fluids in relation to life.

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<sup>137</sup> Pitard, “Tombs and Offerings”, 145-168.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Israelite Death Imagery: Dry Bones and Dry Plants

#### I. Introduction

As demonstrated in previous chapters, fluids in the body, including blood, are important for maintaining physical life. In Chapter two, our discussion of dryness and bones has lent support to the OT concept that death is a psychological and physical experience that has a “de-moisturizing” effect on the bones. This is obvious in Israelite/Judahite burial traditions. The implication here is that since life can be understood in contrast with death, if the dryness of bones signifies death, then the moisture of the body must be symbolic of life. This notion finds support in OT literary and figurative depictions in relation to bones and plant life. I suggest that an exploration of OT concepts of death with respect to these will provide additional evidence that the absence of fluids implies complete death and that fluids are deemed to be necessary for revivification of some sort.

To understand the OT physiology of life, we can look at its physiology of death, and therefore this chapter attempts to understand the relevance of the absence and presence of fluids in relation to death and life. Two points will be clear from this investigation: first that the moisture-life imagery is evident in the references to human-plant imagery found in the Psalms, Isaiah, Ezekiel and elsewhere in the OT. Second, that an identification of life with fluid and death with dryness is a key part of the way in which the writers understood animal, human and plant physiology. This approach examines the development of metaphorical language about human life based on imagery.

## II. Death and Dry Bones in the OT

This investigation begins by looking closely first at the death metaphor, “dry bones” which, represents the most durable part of the human body. The task in this section of the chapter is to explore the connotations of moisture and life in relation to bones in Hebrew thinking. Dry bones are a mark of hopelessness, weakness, illness, and death. Ezekiel’s vision of dry bones signifies that “dry bones” mean complete death (Ezek 37:1-14). The restoration of dry bones to living human beings involves the active role of the רוּחַ (spirit or breath), suggesting Ezekiel’s message here is one of restoration to life by the aid of the spirit in reversing a dry state of the body into one of wetness and life.

### (1) Moisture and the Bone in the OT

The bones are the last component of the human body to decay, and they are the final remains of a person. The bones preserve the essence of the individual. Therefore crushing them meant the destruction of the integrity of its owner (Exod 12:46; Num 9:12; 24:8; Isa 38:13; Dan 6:24). The drying of the bone is used in idiomatic expressions to signify deteriorating health or loss of vitality (Ps 31:10; 102:4; Lam 1:3). Thus the metaphor of dry bones depicts a range of negative conditions, from hopelessness (Ezek 37:11), through ill-health (Prov 17:22) to death (Ezek 37:3, 5, 6). The reversal of this condition of dryness of the bones signifies the restoration of hope, sound health and life.

Hebrew physiology attributes to the marrow the physiological function of moistening the bones. In Job 21: 23-26, all humans are said to have the same destiny after death: “they are laid side by side in the earth, and worms are their shroud. One man dies prosperous, and another dies having never tasted prosperity. Of the one who dies prosperous it is said, “his body well nourished, his bones are moistened (שָׁקַח) with marrow (מֶמֶל).”<sup>1</sup> One function of the מֶמֶל is שָׁקַח, “to irrigate or moisten” the bones, an expression of health and vitality, which indicates that moistened bones are a

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<sup>1</sup> The expression שָׁקַח “moistened” primarily means “to quaff”. In the causative, it means “to irrigate, cause to drink, to water, to moisten or to drown”. The term מֶמֶל refers to fat or marrow in the sense of greasing.

mark of life as opposed to dry bones, which is symbolic of death. Similarly, in the passage, “It shall be health to your navel, and moisture (יִשְׁקֶיךָ) to your bones” (Prov 3:8), the term יִשְׁקֶיךָ refers to the marrow as a “moistener”.<sup>2</sup> In the context of this passage, the fear of YHWH and the shunning of evil bring health to the body and “nourishment” or “moisture” to the bones. Thus, the moistening of the bones depicts health and life. Medicine is contrasted with drying of the bones in Prov 17:22: “A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones”. The former is said to be good medicine, which depicts good health, while the “drying of the bones” connotes the sapping of strength, a psychosomatic illness resulting from a downcast spirit. In this context, the metaphorical description of the physiological symptoms of “drying of the bones” portrays a kind of ill-health that may be tantamount to a “close to Sheol” experience or death. Thus, death and illness lend themselves to metaphors about situations that threaten physical life such as the lack of moisture.

It is in light of this understanding of dry bones as symbolic of death, that the moistening or wetting of the bones in particular, and the body in general, become significant in discussing the Hebrew concept of life. To say the bones are wet is just as saying the body is wet, for the bones represent the body and the whole human being as well.<sup>3</sup>

## (2) Ezekiel’s Vision of Dry Bones: Dryness is Death

The idea of the decomposition of the dead body into dry bones (life to death), is understood in relation to the view of the make-up of the human being. Almost as a test-case of the preceding argument, we now consider the vision of Ezekiel (Ezek 37:1-14), which pictures the reconstruction of a person from dry bones to living beings. In thinking about dry bones and death in Ezek 37, we must address two issues in particular: (1) the restoration of the state of a people in exile and (2) the physiological significance of fluids to the body. Though the former is the primary

<sup>2</sup> The term יִשְׁקֶיךָ figuratively refers to “beverage, refreshment or drink”. James Strong, ‘Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary of the Old Testament’, in the *Abingdon’s Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1980), p. 159.

<sup>3</sup> This notion of the bones being understood to refer to the whole person or the body is expressed in the language of the Psalter: “All my bones shall exclaim, ‘O YHWH, who is like you?’” (Ps 35:10).

interpretation and implication of Ezekiel's vision, my discussion rather focuses on the latter which is relevant to my argument that moisture is life.

Before discussing the physiological implications of the vision in detail, let me make this quick reference to the notion of exile as death. Displacement is a metaphor of death. In the interpretation of the vision (Ezek 37:11-14), the dry bones represent the exiles. "Exile is death", observed Christopher R. Seitz.<sup>4</sup> Israel was totally dead in exile. Return from exile is return to life. As the rattling sound accompanied the realignment of the individual bones into skeletons, each skeleton stood for an individual captive whose despair in exile is represented in the vision as a state of complete death. The people's lament is captured in the words, "our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost, we have been completely cut off"; it depicts their acknowledgement of lifeless condition (Ezek 37:11).<sup>5</sup> Their expression "dry bones" is a language of death. Further in this context, the idea of hopelessness is tied to this expression of death. Therefore the vision must be understood as God's response to his people's words of depression.<sup>6</sup> It was God's intention to combat the despair, which had settled upon the exiles (37:11).<sup>7</sup>

We will now proceed to explore, from a physiological perspective, the concept of dry bones as representative of death. This may also be seen in the OT premise that the very bones in Ezekiel's visionary scene represented complete death. Ezek 37:1-14 suggests the Israelite thinking that life is restored when, (1) unity is restored through the reordering of scattered elements of the body to form a whole again, and (2) when the bones and flesh, reconstructed into a body, are supplied with breath. The matter of the return of breath bringing life to the body is very significant in the discussion that follows. The return of breath or spirit signifies the return of moisture. If dry bones represent death, then the fact that the body cannot live without moisture suggests that the wetness of the bones means life.

The Ezekiel account is structured to make use of the dramatic presentation of the vision of a change from a state of despair to one of hope, from death to life. The

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<sup>4</sup> C. R. Seitz, 'Ezekiel 37:1-14', *Interpretation* 46 (1992), p. 53-56.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Isa 53: 8.

<sup>6</sup> Charles R. Biggs, *The Book of Ezekiel* (Epworth Commentary; London: Epworth Press, 1997), p. 117.

<sup>7</sup> G. A. Cooke, *The Book of Ezekiel* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936), p. 397. Walter Eichrodt, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1970), p. 509. Eichrodt notes that "The vision has come as a mighty answer from God to the despairing laments of the exile".

picture painted by the passage suggests that the state of being in exile is synonymous with death. The unit of 37:1-14 comprises a vision account of 37:1-10 with an interpretative oracle of deliverance in 37:11-14. The oracle consists of a thesis of death (37:11) and a counter-thesis of life (37:12-14). The first section (37:1-10) represents biological death, which is the departure of the life-force from the body. The investigation here focuses on the biological death exhibited by the dry bones in the valley.

The introduction of the vision describes the experience of the prophet being given, by divine agency, a tour of a plain or a broad valley, thereby exposing him to the hopelessness of the situation – “very dry bones.” He saw himself brought supernaturally into this solitary plain by the hand of YHWH. The visionary scene is initially characterized by a pathetic mass of dry, fleshless bones, which is an indication that the once-owners of this defunct pile of human bony relics were now hopelessly dead. The scene was one of a battlefield of a once slaughtered army,<sup>8</sup> a graveyard symbolic of Sheol. YHWH asks a ridiculous question as to whether this extremely desiccated pile of bones can live again. This question was designed to show the impossibility of reversing the hopeless situation on the natural level. In his response to his questioner, the prophet says: “O Lord God, you know” (37:3). This discourse indicated that it would take a miracle or a supernatural intervention to summon these desiccated bones back to life.

There were two stages of their restoration to life: In the initial stage, the oracular description in 37:4-8a depicts a movement from a state of utter decomposition to one of re-composition. The bodies are reconstituted (37:7b-8a): the naked bones are re-clothed with bodies composed of sinews, flesh and skin. But these bodies have no life (37:8b). Initially, YHWH commands the prophet to address these dry bones, announcing to them their imminent revival. The prophet makes his pronouncement as he has been ordered and the death-marking silence is broken by a rattling sound as the bones arrange themselves together, in their proper order, forming skeletons. Then sinews and flesh cover the bones, thereby enabling connection to one another. They are further clothed with skin. What results from this process is an

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<sup>8</sup> Cooke; *The Book of Ezekiel*, p. 399. Cooke observes that to Ezekiel’s mental sight, the plain looked like an ancient battlefield strewn with bones of the slain. Cf. Ezek 37: 9.



army of corpses in an old battlefield. The initial stage of the process has been completed – the denuded bones have been reconstituted into fleshy bodies. At that stage, the scene portrays lifeless human bodies scattered all over the valley. The lifeless bodies will need to live again and this is where the role of the רוח comes in.

### (3) Breath and Physical Life

In OT anthropology, the body and the breath, which vivifies the body are the basic components of the human being. In Gen 2:7, God forms the man (אדם) from the “dust” (עפר) of the “earth” (ארמה), which becomes a “living person” (נפש חיה) when YHWH God puffs out (יפה) into his nostrils, the “breath of life” (נשמת חיים). Thus “life” (חיים) can be understood in terms of the animation of the earthly body by God’s breath (נשמה) in contrast with death, which is the departure of the breath from the body. The vital power of both the רוח and the נשמה is expressed in Job 34:14-15, “If he (God) should take back to himself his wind (רוח), gather to himself his breath (נשמה), all flesh would perish together, and humans would return to clay”. This departure of breath is illustrated by another significant anthropological statement on death, observed by Qoheleth, that after death the עפר must return to the ארמה as it was but the breath (רוח) returns to God who gave it (Eccl 12:7). The Psalter also notes: “When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their רוח, they die and return to their עפר, when you send forth your רוח, they are created; and you renew the face of the ארמה” (Ps 104:29-30).

Ezekiel’s visionary scene of the reconstitution of Israel in the valley seems to borrow from the Genesis scene of Adam’s creation in which he was first fashioned into a lifeless clay shape prior to being animated by the breath of life (Gen 2:7-8). In Ezekiel, the רוח, denoting “breath,” “wind” or “spirit” (Ezek 37:5, 6, 8 -10 and 14) becomes equivalent to נשמה in Gen 2:7. In the Ezekiel scene, the רוח is gathered from the four compass points into the “corpse” to revivify it. In the Genesis scene, YHWH formed the man from the dust of the earth and breathes His נשמת חיים ‘breath of life’ into the nostrils of the lifeless human body. Likewise, in Ezekiel, the

final stage involved the reanimation of the bodies by the רוח. The term רוח is used in 37:1 as the instrument by which God transported Ezekiel to the spot of the vision. In Ezek 37:5, 8 and 10, it is rendered “breath”, signifying the breath that imparts life. In Ezek 37:9, Ezekiel is to command the רוח from the four points of the compass to breathe into the slain. These “slain” (הַרְגוּיִם) refer to the corpses, which result from the clothing of the dry bones with sinews, flesh and skin. In Ezek 37:10, the slain become alive (וַיַּחְיֶינָה) as a result of being reanimated by the רוח. Thus, an exceeding great army now finds itself standing upon its feet.

The concept of breath (רוח) figures prominently in Hebrew notions of life and death. The breath is the animating element that sustains a person’s physical existence and defines his spiritual being. This vital principle is synonymous with life, spirit, soul and mind. The רוח is the principle, which ranges in meaning from physical gentle breath (cool breeze) that goes in and out of the mouth and nostrils,<sup>9</sup> to a wind in the form of a tempest or a hurricane. In Gen 3:8, it is referred to as the “evening breeze” in the expression רוח הַיּוֹם (cool air of the day). The theme of רוח is associated with notions of vitality.

#### **(4) A Passage from Death to Life (Ezek 37:1-10)**

An analysis of Ezek 37:1-10 helps us understand the physiological import of the vision and reveals how the Israelites might have understood this physiological picture of their national experience of exile. In the passage, we see a two-phase process of reconstruction from death to life. This reconstruction, which I define as revivification, involves a passage of an individual from an initial phase of the dry bony remains to the final phase as a living body. The beginning of the initial phase is characterized by a state of complete dryness depicting a condition of being completely separated from life, a portrait of death indicated by the very dry condition of the denuded bones scattered in the open valley. In the initial phase of revivification (vv. 1-8), we see the initial action of the רוח, which joins these scattered bones together. The skeletons are then clothed with flesh (vv. 5-8), thereby transforming the once-dry

<sup>9</sup> The meaning of רוח as breath and smell gives a place of prominence to the nostril in the physical parts of the body.

bones into corpses. In the second and final phases the רוּחַ is breathed on these corpses, giving them life (vv. 9-10). Thus the transformation into life is now complete.

The final stage indicates that the living body may be characterized by the state where the bones clothed with the flesh are no more dry. Thus, by implication, the passage in Ezek 37:1-10 is about a transformation from the absence of רוּחַ to the presence of רוּחַ and from a state of death to one of life manifest with the presence of moisture. The obvious implication is that, the return to life as indicated by the passage, is a process, which begins with the dry medium of the body and undoubtedly ends in the wet medium of the body. If the dry bones meant death, as indicated by the question, “can these bones live?” (v. 3), then the now living bodies, by implication, must be wet (v.10).

The two-phased process of death-rites as proposed by R. Hertz has guided this analysis of the passage in Ezekiel. In his analysis, the first phase affected the dead body shortly after death (the “wet” medium of the body), while the second phase affected the remains of the body at some later date (the “dry” medium of the body).<sup>10</sup> However in my analysis of the revivification of the dry bones, the reverse of Hertz’s principle is what seems applicable. We suggest that Ezek 37:1-10 cannot be understood in terms of rites of passage though it has been possible for me to apply some of Hertz’s principles. We shall discuss Hertz’s principle as it applies to burial rituals in a later chapter.

### (5) Summary

In light of this concept, the “drying of the bones” furnishes a clear metaphor to denote ‘loss of vitality’. OT expressions of moistening of the bone by the marrow support the idea that the moistening of the bones designates health and vitality, as opposed to the expression of dry bones indicating ill-health and despair. Though the passage in Prov 17:22 may be viewed as a portrait of psychosomatic disease, rather than death, it is obviously a prelude to loss of physical life. In OT thinking, the desiccative effect of

<sup>10</sup> Robert Hertz, ‘A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death’, pp. 27-86.

a broken spirit and despondency is expressed not only in Prov 17:22 but also in a profound manner in Ezek 37:11.

In the vision given to Ezekiel in 37:1-10 and 37:11-14, there is a clear relationship between death and the presence of dry bones. The grave parallels the lifeless valley full of dry bones. Mention of the grave and the dry bones in the field is an imagery of Sheol. All that has been discussed so far about Ezekiel's vision with regard to dry bones clothed with sinews, flesh, skin and animated with the *רוח*, must be seen against the background of the theme of "dryness and death". The visionary scene in 37:1-10 provides us with, among other things, a graphic presentation of the biological reconstruction of dry scattered bones into a fresh living human being full of breath and vitality. It was a vision of the reversal of death and dryness. The visionary event of Ezekiel depicts a movement from disintegration to the re-integration of the constituent parts of the human body, from death to life, from dry bones to wet bones. This imagery is used because, in Hebrew terms, it is impossible for the bones of a living body to be dry. It signifies a reversal of the process and sequence of losing moisture through the decomposition of the corpse.

The foregoing suggests that, for the writers of Ezekiel 37:1-14 and other OT passages, dry bones might have been identified with death and dryness and therefore, by implication, life was identified with fluids and moisture. With this in mind, we turn to plant physiology in the OT for a further analogy between wetness and life.

### III. Death and Dry Plants in the OT

#### (1) Introduction

My second death metaphor is "dry plant", drawing on the OT dry tree/ dry grass metaphor of death (as seen esp. in the Psalms and Isaiah) to explain the need for moisture/fluids in order to support human life. The moisture-life metaphor is rooted in the OT habit of comparing humans and plants. Plants sustained by water are described as green and prosperous. Thus wetness of plants symbolizes life as dryness symbolizes the end of life. I have chosen plants to represent human life because many of the plant-imagery in the OT has to do, mostly, with dryness and wetness, and draw

parallels to the living and dying of humans. Plants prosper near water and die in a dry environment.<sup>11</sup>

Frymer-Kensky discusses extensively Israelite agricultural imagery as used in the OT. Prominent in her discussion are such terms as “sow”, “plant”, and “uproot”. She attempts to support a biblical imagery of man emerging from the ground.<sup>12</sup> Nielsen’s work is also noteworthy. She is concerned with the tree imagery in various passages of Isaiah as representative of the redactional reinterpretation of image material already available. In her analysis of Isa 4:2-6 for example, Nielsen thinks Isaiah uses tree images to interpret the current political situation during the exile.<sup>13</sup> In the OT, there are life and death implications that flow from the metaphor of the human being as a plant.<sup>14</sup> One striking aspect of the plant symbolism in the OT is that the dryness and wetness of plants is used as a means to understand better the human experiences of life and death. Though a few other scholars have looked at the plant-imagery in the OT, none of them have specifically looked at the relationship between human life and death, and plant-life and moisture.<sup>15</sup>

In the OT, the concept of humans as mortal beings can be identified with the life cycle of the flora, hence the extensive use of plant imagery within a physiological context. Botany in its symbolic applications can be connected with human

<sup>11</sup> The OT botanical imagery depicts the human being as a plant, which depends on water in order to grow from seed and bear fruit. Job’s own description of his freshness and life images a completely wet plant: “My root was spread out by the waters, and the dew lay all night upon my branch. My glory was fresh in me” (Job 29:19-20a).

<sup>12</sup> Tikva Frymer-Kensky, ‘The Planting of Man: A Study in Biblical Imagery,’ in J. H. Marks & R. M. Good, eds., *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East* (Guilford, Connecticut: Four Quarters Publishing, 1987), pp. 129-136. As Frymer-Kensky rightly observes, the phrase “rise up from the earth” in Exod 1:10 must be the implication of the Hebrew phrase *עלה מן-הארץ*. She does not think the traditional translation “and so get out of the land” makes sense. She rightly argues that Pharaoh’s worry was that the Israelites could be numerous and then join the enemies but not about their leaving.

<sup>13</sup> Kirsten Nielsen, *There is Hope for a Tree: The Tree as a Metaphor in Isaiah* (JSOTSup. 65; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), p. 185.

<sup>14</sup> More important for our study of Israelite arboreal imagery of human experiences is its symbolism associated with life and death. The tree is one of the prominent symbols in Israelite thought. In a plant-man imagery, Amos compares the Amorite’s height to a cedar and his strength as oaks (Amos 2:9). Parts of a tree were also employed as imagery of the human being, e.g. stem, roots, branch. The tree is present in OT royal imagery. Isa 11:1 reads “אֶחָטָר (twig) shall come forth from the *גֹּזֵעַ* (stem) of Jesse, and a *נֹצֵר* (branch) from its *שֹׁרֶשׁ* (rootsucker) *יִפְרֶה* (shall bear fruit)”. Each of these named parts of the tree has a human reference. The “branch” is an image of a king. A new king is seen as a branch in Dan 11:7.

<sup>15</sup> See Gale A. Yee, ‘A Form-Critical Study of Isaiah 5:1-7 as a Song and a Juridical Parable’, *CBQ* 43 (1981), pp. 30-40; Gerald T. Sheppard ‘More on Isaiah 5:1-7 as a Juridical Parable’, *CBQ* 44 (1982), p. 30-41; Yosef Kahaner, ‘Metaphors of the Vine and Olive Tree’, *Dor leDor* 2 (1973-1974), pp. 15-20.

physiological processes, with fluid-dependent tendencies, which carry implications of life and death. In this investigation, there are several textual sources of plant symbolism in the OT; the sources consulted are those Hebrew texts in which the imagery is prominent with regard to human physical life. Though the OT references could be supplemented by a few references to *ANET*,<sup>16</sup> my focus will not be on the ANE ideas. This section investigates the OT view of plants; especially grass, as representing human beings and God's people. Attention will be given to the grass-withering imagery in the Psalms and Isaiah because these, among the OT books, contain the richest in the use of this type of imagery.

## (2) The Human Beings as Plants

In the OT the metaphor of dryness as death and wetness as life is related to both the whole plant and parts of it (roots, leaves, etc.). When trees lose moisture, they represent the various stages in the process of dying; they represent a contrast between human life and death. Common to both botanical life and human life is the need for fluid in order to live. In Isaiah, we see the plant-withering image of the people, "You will be like an oak whose leaves wither (נָבֵל) and a garden which has no water" (Isa 1:30). In this verse, the imagery of withered trees and waterless gardens reminds us of the connection between fluids and life.<sup>17</sup>

The arboreal language used to describe the nation of Israel as a plant is evident in the OT.<sup>18</sup> In Isa 5:1-7, the vineyard of YHWH is Israel and the people of Judah are his pleasant plants. But due to the injustice and unrighteousness among his people

<sup>16</sup> The Ancient Near Eastern people were rich in "plant" imagery relating to the human being, the nation and God. The botanical imagery of the human being is attested in Mesopotamian literature. In Ugaritic poetry can be found references to the tree imagery of human beings. Significant are such lines as 'My mother is ...fir tree (*giš ašuh*) ... my mother is a fragrant date palm'. See Schaeffer, *Ugaritica* V, pp. 311-319. The description of the *giš ašuh* as a watered tree is also an expression of an Ugaritic notion of the vitality of a wetted tree. Ugaritic personal names contain comparison with the tree, e.g. *bn arz*, 'son of Cedar', *bn hršn*, 'son of forest'. For further discussion of this, see F. Gröndahl, *Die Personennamen de Texte* (Studia Pohl 1; Rome 1967), p. 29. Babylonia is also compared to tree in the *Erra Epic* IV; see Benjamin R. Foster, *Form Distant Days: Myths, Tales and Poetry of Ancient Mesopotamia* (Bethesda: CDL Press, 1995). The tree imagery was also used of certain Mesopotamian gods such as *Nergal* and *Kubu*. See *Nergal* (RLA 4, 139-140); *Kubu* (CAD 4, 275). These gods were related to certain trees.

<sup>17</sup> This may be illustrated with Isaiah's expression "garden which has no water" (Isa 1:30), which indicates the consequences of false religion. In this verse, the oak, symbolizing life has its leaves losing moisture; the garden, which symbolizes life, has no contact with water. This experience of lack of water spelling disaster as a result of dependence on false religion is a metaphor for lifelessness.

<sup>18</sup> For further discussions, see Frymer-Kensky, 'The Planting of Man', p. 134.

(i.e., his plants), YHWH will judge them by withholding the rains from the clouds. Another clear picture of the plant image of the nation Israel appears in Isa 27:6, where those who come from Jacob will be caused to take root: Israel will blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruits. But here, in a millennial song of God's vineyard in Isa 27:2-6, YHWH declares himself as the keeper of the vineyard. The *כִּנְמֹר*, vineyard, in Isa 27:2 is owned by God and He waters it (Isa 27:3).<sup>19</sup> These verses demonstrate the importance of water for the sustenance of Israel, the vineyard.

The provision of a wet ground in which to sustain the offspring of the Israel/plant is very important. That trees flourish because they are planted by streams of water (Isa 44:4), implies that wetness supports growth, a fundamental characteristic of life. However, it must be noted that, it is not only water that brings wetness and therefore vivification to the plant; the spirit also does. In Isa 43:3-4, the significance of water for the sustenance of plants is applied to the restored nation of Israel, "I will pour water on the thirsty and liquid on the dry ground. I will pour my spirit on your seed, and my blessing on your offspring, and they shall sprout up as among grass, as willows by waterways". It must be noted that the *רוּחַ* of YHWH now supports sprouting and life instead of withering and death as in Isa 40:6-8.

Ezekiel is not a stranger in the use of arboreal imagery. He uses the vine as an image for the nation of Israel (Ezek 17:6, 7, 9). Ezek 19:10-14 echoes a similar idea where Israel is depicted as a vine, which was planted by waters (Ezek 19:10). Its fruitfulness represents life; plucking, fruits dried by the east wind, limbs broken and dried up, consumed by fire, these are all metaphors of death (Ezek 19:12). He utilizes the vine-tree among other trees of the forest as a simile for the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Ezek 15:6), and the cedar as an allegory of Assyria (Ezek 31). Hosea also utilizes plant imagery. Ephraim is thought of as having roots, which could potentially dry up (Hos 9:16).<sup>20</sup> Lebanon is also compared with a tree. Hosea draws a parallel between redeemed Israel and the forest of Lebanon (Hos 14:5-6). Israel's growth is compared with that of the lily and its beauty to that of an olive tree. YHWH promises

<sup>19</sup> Nielsen, *There is Hope for a Tree*, p. 118. Nielsen observes here, a motif of failing to water the vineyard as a punishment. In Nielsen's opinion, a "careful watering is introduced as an expression of the vineyard owner's continuing solicitude (Isa 27:3)".

<sup>20</sup> Ephraim's crown of glory was to become like a wild flower (Isa 28:1).

to be as the dew to Israel. The use of this implies God's provision of moisture and wetness that is necessary for the growth of the Tree/Israel.

### (3) Wetness as Prosperity and Righteousness

Before we leave our discussion of plant imagery utilized in the OT, I wish to make a further observation about the righteous as a tree in the OT and other Jewish literature. In Psalm 1, the theme of life is expressed by the use of a simile between a tree and a righteous man who flourishes in the time of drought. The righteous is like a plant located near a constant supply of water. The righteous is compared to the flourishing palm and the cedar (Ps 92:3). Trito-Isaiah refers to Israel to be restored as the righteous plants of YHWH. Of their relation to YHWH, Isaiah describes Israel as [מטעי] נצר (מטעו), 'the shoot (or branch) of my planting' (Isa 60:21).<sup>21</sup> In Isa 61:3, God's people are individually referred to as אילי הצדק, "oaks of righteousness" while as a whole nation they are מטע יהוה, "a planting of YHWH".

In Jer 17, the plant imagery draws parallels between a flourishing tree and a flourishing life of the one who trusts in God, and between a drying shrub and the destruction of the cursed whose hope rests in his fellow human being. There is, here, an expression of a moral situation with connotations of two vital elements: life for those who trust in YHWH and death for those who do not. Plants located by water stream are prosperous, as their wetness enables them to withstand drought, and such is the person who delights in the Law of God (Ps 1:3) and the one who trusts in the Lord (Jer 17:7-8).<sup>22</sup> This depicts the threatened nature, security, and life of a tree separated from a source of water. As one can expect, in the OT, a moral code lies behind the use of arboreal imagery in cases where a tree is located close by a river.

In the OT references to the tree of life are found in Gen 2:4-4:24, Prov 3:18; 11:30; 13:12 and 15:4. Discussing the concept of the tree of life in the Bible, Wallace observes that the origins of the concept are obscure and there is no explicit reference

<sup>21</sup> In the MT Isa 60:21 has K'thib מטעו נצר and Q're מטעי נצר.

<sup>22</sup> The greenness of the leaves indicate vibrant life – the tree's roots easily locates water and takes it in, hence its leaves becoming fresh and supporting the bearing of fruits. Heat and drought are threats of insecurity and death.



to such a tree in other ANE literature.<sup>23</sup> Ezekiel's description the restored Jerusalem in Ezek 47:1-12 is illustrative. Evergreen trees grow on either side of the stream. Their fruits will never cease and will be for food; their leaves will not wither.<sup>24</sup> Here also, we see how greenness and water are related to life. Of interest in this study is the picturesque description of longevity with tree imagery. For instance, in Isa 62:22, the "people of God" are parallel to the "tree of life" in God's new creation in relation to life span: 'the days of the Tree of Life will be as the days of my people'. The pomegranate, which is filled with dark red liquid, was also designated as the tree of life.<sup>25</sup> The juice was mingled with wine. Wine was also made from the juice of the fruit (Cant 8:2). Its fruit played a prominent part in ancient mythology as a symbol of fertility.<sup>26</sup>

#### (4) Terminologies of Dryness and Greenness

The terms *יבש*, *יבש*, *יבש* and *יבש* are used to describe both the diminishing and termination of life in the OT. These terms are interpreted as referring to the drying up of a plant. The term *נבל*, which means "to wither or to wilt",<sup>27</sup> connotes "falling away or dropping down, failing, fainting, fading away".<sup>28</sup> References in the Psalms include: "his leaf shall not wither" (1:3); "for they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither (*יבולין*) as the green herb" (37:2).<sup>29</sup> In the context of OT botany, the term *יבש* means to dry up, (as in water) or wither (as in herbage).<sup>30</sup> The term is used to denote the absence of moisture. It is rendered "wither(ed)" in such passages as: "heart is smitten and withered like grass" (Ps 102:4); "the hay is withered

<sup>23</sup> Howard N. Wallace, 'Tree of Knowledge and Tree of Life', in *ABD* 4.658.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Rev 22:1-2 where on either side of the river of the Water of Life, which flowed from the throne of God, stood a tree of life yielding twelve crops of fruits, one for each month of the year. Ezekiel's description is most likely the background for this passage in the book of Revelation.

<sup>25</sup> J. C. Trever, 'Pomegranate' in *IDB* 3.840.

<sup>26</sup> Trever, 'Pomegranate', 840. The seed was a symbol of fertility throughout the ANE.

<sup>27</sup> For a detailed explanation of this term see H. -J. Fabry, '*נבל*', *TDOT* 9.151-157.

<sup>28</sup> The noun *נבל*, refers to a skin-bag for carrying water (from collapsing when empty), vessel, bottle, pitcher. See Strong, 'Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary of the Old Testament', 99. Thus the plant can be thought of as a *נבל* (vase) which, being emptied of liquids, faints and eventually dies off when all the water is gone out of it. This is the botanic imagery of the experience of the human vase.

<sup>29</sup> *יבולין* is derived from *נבל*. Another derivative is the term for a "corpse or carcass", *נבלה*.

<sup>30</sup> It also connotes "failing, being confused, ashamed or disappointed" in other contexts.

away” (Isa 15:6); “blow on them and they will wither” (Isa 40:24). The terms נבל, יבש and ימלו are employed in the OT to express botanic dehydration and desiccation. They are used in the OT to describe the plants’ experience of losing wetness by evaporation, and subsequently have been understood as a metaphor for death.

In similar fashion, the green color of the tree functions as a symbol of vitality and life. It indicates the presence of moisture. A variety of verbs are used to assert that a plant has moisture: ירק, כירק, לח and רענן. The term רענן means fresh, luxurious, prosperous, and flourishing. It means “to be green” in regard to plants. According to Hosea “Ephraim shall say, what have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green (רענן) fir tree. From me is thy fruit found” (Hos 14:9 [Eng. 14:8]). Other references are: “but her leaf shall be רענן” (Jer 17:8)<sup>31</sup>; “The wicked... spreading himself like a רענן bay tree” (Ps 37:35); “I am כזית רענן (like a green olive tree) in the house” (Ps 52:10 [Eng. 52:8; LXX 52:10]).<sup>32</sup> Ezekiel, using the tree imagery of God’s judgment on a nation, makes reference to the green tree drying up: “All trees of the field will know that I the Lord have brought down the tall tree (עץ) and have made high the low tree, have dried up the green (לח –moist, fresh) tree and make the dry (יבש) tree to sprout” (Ezek 17:24). Ps 37:2 writes of a people to be soon cut down like the grass, and wither כירק רשא (as the green herb). The noun ירק meaning greenness is also used of grass or greenery in relation to vegetation.<sup>33</sup> In the OT, greenery connotes wetness in that first: the greenness of plants is often juxtaposed to the dryness of plants, and second, a green plant is connected with the presence of water. Given the above discussion, what is significant is that greenery, in relation to plants, implies wetness and life in OT thought.

<sup>31</sup> Greenery is contrasted with dryness in Jer 17:8: “For he will be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreads out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green (רענן); and shall not be careful in the year of drought (בצרת) dearth or destitution) neither shall cease from yielding fruit”.

<sup>32</sup> The word רענן here is rendered κατάκαρπος, “fruitful” in the LXX.

<sup>33</sup> The noun is also used of pale, yellowish green of young and pale vegetation.

#### IV. Dying: Withering Grass Imagery

Having looked at plants in general, I turn to focus briefly on grass and try to explore the relationship between grass-withering imagery and the loss of life. I intend to show that the grass-imagery in the OT portrays various aspects of human existence, because it can express the vulnerability of humankind and human frailty. It reflects the impermanent nature of life and the shortness of the human life span, the quick disappearance of the living, the fading away and cessation of the glory and beauty of mankind at death, and above all, dryness as death in contrast to wetness as a mark of life.

##### (1) Terminology of Grass

The more common Hebrew terms חֲצִיר,<sup>34</sup> רֶשֶׁא and עֵשֶׂב are rendered “grass” in most English versions of the OT and each can be understood to metaphorically describe the human being. These terms essentially denote any tender green shoot or herb. While the greenness of grass connotes freshness and vitality, its tenderness carries with it, implications of frailty or vulnerability. In both the Psalms and Isaiah, these various plant terms can define the human being. Thanatological connotations of grass imagery can be found primarily in the Psalms and Isaiah.

Isaiah refers to grass with various terms: רֶשֶׁא (15:6), עֵשֶׂב (37:27), and חֲצִיר in the rest of its references to grass (35:7; 40:6-8; 44:4; 51:12). However, the book of Isaiah does not use רֶשֶׁא in reference to a person. With the exception of 35:7, Isaiah uses חֲצִיר in reference to humanity. While 44:3-5 speaks about the flourishing of the Israelites as the people of YHWH provided with wetness, 40:6-8, 44:4, and 51:12 emphasize the connotations of transience and death.

The Psalms make more use of the term עֵשֶׂב in describing humanity (72:16; 102:4, 11).<sup>35</sup> The flourishing of the wicked like עֵשֶׂב is referred to in 92:7. There is also the עֵשֶׂב - withering image in Ps 102:4, 11. The noun חֲצִיר is used in the Psalms

<sup>34</sup> The word חֲצִיר refers to a court or an abode. Its use of vegetation, especially, grass, herb, hay or leek apparently derives from the “greenness” of a compound of an abode.

<sup>35</sup> Grass is referred to as food for oxen in Ps 106:20. This verse is therefore irrelevant to our discussion of imagery.

to refer to transience and termination of life in the contexts of either being cut down (37:2) or withering and dying (90:5; 103:15; 129:6). The other references to חֲצִיר are not used in association with humanity (104:14; 147:8).

In the OT, dry grass is used to indicate the various shades of meaning expressed by the following conditions: (1) infertility, (2) illness, and (3) death. The concept of the dryness of a person has connotations of infertility: one passage in Isaiah echoes the plight of the eunuch: “neither let the eunuch say, behold, I am a dry tree” (Isa 56:3). The eunuch has the inability to reproduce. He cannot avoid the disgrace of childlessness (cf. Gen 30:23). It is in this context that to be like dry grass is to be a person marked by reproach. His isolation and infertility make him as if dead. An investigation of the references to grass in both the Psalms and Isaiah will set forth grass as the epitome of “abundance” as well as “transience”. The grass terms generally refer to the human being as a living plant that springs up, flourishes quickly and soon dries up and passes away. “Grass” is a figurative expression of either a flourishing life or a short life span. Thus, it connotes both vitality and loss of vitality. The implication is that, just as the plant swiftly loses its vitality, so do humans.

## **(2) Flourishing and Abundance**

Frymer-Kensky also sees grass as a metaphor for abundance in the OT. He makes reference to Job 5:25; Ps 92:8; 72:16; Isa 43:3-4; Ezek 16:7. Grass is plentiful. As such, it is useful as a way to describe a vast quantity or innumerable number of people. In the OT, grass is used as a metaphor to depict a large number of persons. Job’s offspring is compared with grass. They will multiply כַּעֲשֵׂב הָאָרֶץ “like grass of the earth” (Job 5:25). The Psalms use the “grass metaphor” to depict abundance or the multiplication of a population. In Ps 72:16, it is said, the people of the city will flourish כַּעֲשֵׂב הָאָרֶץ “like grass of the earth”. Likewise, in Ps 92:8, the wicked will flourish like עֵשֶׂב “grass”. Isaiah also employs this “grass metaphor” to describe abundance in his words, “For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground: I will pour my spirit on your seed, and my blessing on your offspring: And they will spring up *as* among the חֲצִיר ‘grass’, as willows by the water courses”

(Isa 44:3-4). The importance of water to the prosperous life of the plant is not left out in this reference.

In the OT, grass is the epitome of “profusion” or “multitude” as noted above. But at the same time it becomes an image of “shortness of life”. However, in the texts about the withering of grass, what obviously marks the progression of the text is not its flourishing, but that which follows – its drying up, falling and death. Read in the context of “quantity”, where the image is used to refer to the numerous populations of offspring, grass imagery is of little significance to us in this study, but read as a background to understanding the connection between moisture and life, grass assumes a significant role in reflecting humanity and death.

### **(3) Grass, Transience and Death in the Psalms and Isaiah**

Thus, the grass image is chosen because of its duality. The image contains the tension between both the negative and the positive. The common use of grass arises from the fact that grass flourishes quickly but can wither away quickly in the scorching sun or dry wind. This flourishing implies wetness, as no plant can flourish without moisture. But its flourishing is followed by drying up, which indicates deterioration and diminishing of life. This is a description of diminishing of life by way of loss of moisture. The image describes the inevitable end of life, which is marked by desiccation, and lack of water and wetness. Grass is a significant “life-image” in the OT. In the OT, language about grass is used as a metaphor for one’s life span. Grass is a useful metaphor for a short life span. In this case, the life-cycle of grass corresponds with human life and death. In contrast to the tree, which depicts longevity, grass is used to depict short life span. A clearer understanding of Israelite concept of dryness and death appears in the Psalms and Isaiah, where the people’s short life span is described by the use of grass imagery.<sup>36</sup> Both the Psalms and Isaiah express the impermanence of man as compared with that of grass.

In this section, we concern ourselves with the texts, which in various ways describe the diminishing of plant life and its death as it withers. It must be said that,

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<sup>36</sup> It appears the use of the grass imagery in both the Psalms and Isaiah finds its basis in the climatic conditions of Palestine.

as regards the choice of terminology, the words יבש and נבל describing grass in Isaiah are also present in the psalms that make reference to grass withering.

#### (a) Grass imagery in the Psalms

In the Book of Psalms, grass imagery takes several forms, ranging from the flourishing of life to ill-health and subsequently death. There are contexts in which grass carries connotations of vitality and life: ויציצו מעיר כעשב הארץ “and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth” (Ps 72:16). The expression יציצו here, implying a flowering or blossom is a mark of growth and vivacity. A similar idea found in Ps 92:7 (MT. 92:8), which describes the sprouting or shooting up (בפרח) of the wicked like עשב and is compared with the flourishing (יציצו) of the wicked and their eventual permanent destruction. In contrast, in Ps 102:5 (Eng. 102:4), the phrase כעשב ויבש לבי “my heart is dried up like grass”, depicts an emotional condition of an ailing heart, struck or slain with affliction and trouble.<sup>37</sup>

The idea of dryness here is that of ill-health, more negatively, with implications of “dying”. This idea of dryness finds a parallel in the preceding line in Ps 102:4 (MT), ועצמותי כמו־קדר נחרו, and my bones are burned as hearth. This is a strength-sapping condition described with the dry-bone metaphor, as חרר also may imply a drying up effected through violent heat or scorching.<sup>38</sup> Ps 102:12 [Eng. 102:11] also reads, “my days are like a shadow that decline; and I am withered like grass”. In this expression ואני כעשב איבש the Psalmist describes the imminent end of his life with the imagery of dry fragile herbage. Man’s life span is expressed as that of the grass and the flower (Ps 103:15): “Man, his days are like grass, his flowering like that of a wildflower”.

<sup>37</sup> In the passage “my heart is smitten and withered like grass” (Ps 102:5 KJV), the root יבש having the meaning “dryness” is employed in describing an unhealthy condition of the heart, in which context it puts dryness within the domain surrounding the concept of sickness, in that, apart from indicating biologically, loss of water and desiccation it also refers to emotional illness.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Jer 17:6 where חרר, describing a parched place refers figuratively to the unpleasant end of the life of the godless. See also Ps 69:4; Isa 24:6. In Deut 28:22, the derivative חרחר refers to fever an ailment characterize by violent heat or intense burning sensation.

Ps 37:2 reads, “For they shall swiftly be cut down like the grass”,<sup>39</sup> and wither as the green herb. A similar imagery of the shortness of the human life span is located in Ps 103:15. In this text, the life of אָנוֹשׁ, mankind, is compared to חֲצִיר: “As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so does he flourish”. Human life is like grass in the morning (Ps 90:5). Grass is relatively vulnerable and has a short life span. It dries quickly. Therefore, the plight of those who hate Zion is compared with the impermanence of grass. They are like grass that grows on the roof, which dries up before it is fully grown (Ps 129:6-7).

The theme of death in Ps 90:5 (i.e., the shortness of the human life span) is well in keeping with the theme of dehydration found Ps 90:6 (the “shortness of grass life”). Ps 90:6 uses the terms יָבֵשׁ and יְמוּלֵל to indicate the complete lack of moisture in comparing human death with dry grass. The danger of dryness was recognized by the ancient Israelites. Therefore a long-life span implies a long period of wetness and sustenance provided for by the presence of moisture.

#### (b) Grass Imagery in Isaiah

Isaiah echoes the same idea of mortal man becoming as grass: “I, even I, am he that comforts you: who are you that you should be afraid of a man who will die, and of the son of man who will be made *as חֲצִיר*” (Isa 51:12). As Nielsen rightly puts it, Deutero-Isaiah presents grass as an image of the transient human (Isa 40: 6-8, 24; 47:14 51:12).<sup>40</sup> Behind these passages lies the concept of the human being whose life is uncertain and short. Further clearer illustration of the anthropological significance of Isaiah’s grass imagery can be found in Isa 40:6-8. In Isa 40:6-8, the permanence of

<sup>39</sup> The LXX reads ὅτι ὡσεὶ χόρτος ταχὺ ἀποξηρανθήσονται, “because like grass, they shall quickly be dried up” (LXX Ps 36:2). The expression יְמוּלֵל, “they will be cut down”, is rendered ἀποξηρανθήσονται. The word ἀποξηρανθήσονται may be used of the *drying up* of a river. In the LXX, the word דָּשָׁא is rendered λάχανα meaning green plants, vegetables. Here in the LXX, the green plants are said to ἀποπεσοῦνται *fall off* rather than יְבוּלֵן, wither. The expression יְמוּלֵל, “they will be cut down”, is rendered ἀποξηρανθήσονται.

<sup>40</sup> Kirsten Nielsen, *There is Hope for a Tree*, p. 266. According to Nielsen, Deutero-Isaiah, in these passages, uses grass in a negative sense. However, in Trito-Isaiah (66:14), the grass image has a positive connotation - here, in relation to the deliverance of Jerusalem, bones shall sprout like grass. In the Hebrew reading of this verse: כְּדָשָׁא תִפְרַחְנָה וְנִוְרַעָה וְעֲצָמוֹתֵיכֶם, the noun דָּשָׁא is rendered βοτάνη in the LXX is often translated ‘grass’ in English. Note the LXX version: καὶ τὰ ὅσα ὁμῶν ὡς βοτάνη ἀνατελεῖ, “your bones will arise like botany (plant or vegetation)”.

the word is in contrast with transience of humanity; humans are fragile. The same idea is expressed in Isa 40:6-8, which also expresses human frailty: “All flesh is grass and all its compassion like wild flowers. Grass dries, wild flowers wither, for the Lord’s רוח has blown on them: just so people are grass”. The רוח is an agent of dryness (dehydration, desiccation), which brings life to an end. Grass dries, wildflowers wither, but the word of the Lord will stand forever.

An analysis of the botanic imagery of humankind in Isa 40:6-8 illustrates human transience and mortality by the use of grass imagery. The permanence of the דבר of the Lord (it will stand forever) is contrasted with the impermanence of flesh and grass. The process of diminishing human life is illustrated by the metaphor of dryness: “Dryness” and “withering” are synonymous with cessation of life. Dryness is death while wetness is life. By extension of this analogy, humans, like plants, dry up in dying.

Read in the context of the stability and permanence of the word of God, we may perceive grass as figuratively illustrating how the impermanence of humans and plant life stand in contrast with the permanence of God’s word. Of interest here, however, is how man compares with the plant. We must understand that the plant imagery here compares with human nature but contrasts with the nature of God’s word – Man is like grass, but God’s word is not like grass. Flesh (בשר) is grass; the people (עם) are grass. As grass withers, so does the flesh wither. And so do the people as well. But the word of God neither withers nor fades. Withering and fading are contrasted with standing forever (Isa 40:8). Long life is juxtaposed with short life as wetness is with dryness. The opposite of “withering” in this context is permanence, thereby equating permanence with wetness. Impermanence expressed as dryness here carries connotations of the grass’ potential to die, which is a characteristic of כל בשר and the עם.

Isa 15:6 reads: יבש חציר כלה רשא ירק לא היה, “the grass withers, the grass fails, there is no green thing” (a living plant compared with greenness). In the context of this passage both יבש “wither” and כלה “fail” are terms to describe death. Another illustration of Isaiah concerns Ephraim, which is said to wither like a wild flower. Here too it blows away in the רוח (Isa 28:1-4). All humans are said to be like



a leaf, which withers and is blown away by the רוּחַ (Isa 64:5). These passages from above describe what occurs when the רוּחַ of YHWH blows over the חֲצִיר. The vital force represented by the fluid leaves the plant. It ceases to grow for it loses its freshness. It is evident that this description should be understood as describing an important process in human death. Isaiah's message about grass illustrates the transitory nature of human life and its swift passage from life to death.

#### **(4) Summary of Plant Imagery of Life and Death**

Summarizing the observations at which we have arrived, from an analysis of grass imagery in Isaiah and the Psalms, two major OT themes present themselves: abundance in terms of population and the transient nature of human life. The more relevant theme in the context of this discussion is the latter, namely, grass imagery used to describe human mortality. In Israelite thanatology, the withering of grass is a prominent symbol. Specifically, the imagery of withering grass in the Psalms and Isaiah indicates a curtailed life span. This symbolic use of the grass as a metaphor is used to describe Israelite self-understanding. It symbolizes the transience of human existence and mundane life.<sup>41</sup> It associates the withering of grass with death, the prime characteristic of material existence or biological life.

It becomes obvious that our study presents us with an example of how by the use of grass imagery, both Isaiah and the Psalms are able to interpret the uncertainty and impermanence of life and the swift ending of physical life, so that their audience could see a connection between the present flourishing greenery of life and the realities of a withering future. From the choice of grass-imagery, it is clear that the end of both human and plant life is eventually linked with dryness.

By speaking of life in plant imagery, Isaiah and the Psalms involve their audience in their message in such a manner as to help them understand the reality of humanity via language about plants, particularly, what the everyday sight of grass-life teaches humans about themselves. The passages concerned with human life span are formulated in plant imagery. The author gives his interpretations of the essence of human life by using images of plants instead of plainly referring to either men or

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<sup>41</sup> Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), p. 301. Motyer observes that "Grass is an emblem of transiency". Cf. Isa 37:27.

women. The explanation of this may be that if humans observe their own nature outside themselves, through the image of plants, it becomes clear that early existence is all about shooting up from the ground, putting forth branches and fresh leaves, bearing flowers, and fruit, reaching the high point of glory - all this while depending on water for sustenance – and then like the plant, suddenly begin to lose moisture, wither and die.

In the present investigation, plant imagery has been examined in the context of Hebrew thought. Plant imagery, specifically tree, herbs and grass, express our human experience in this life, and the world in relation to availability of moisture. This imagery, in general, has on the one hand, a biological and physiological application, and on the other hand expresses thanatological concerns. From the foregoing discussion, it seems clear that the plant metaphor provided the Israelites of the OT with rich symbolism for their concepts of their own life and death in relation to dryness and wetness. What we have attempted to examine is conjunction with life span as it relates to plant imagery of life and death in the context of the presence and absence of moisture. More particularly, the use of fluid related terms as “withering” and “greenery” (flourishing) of plants has been discussed in order to show how the OT uses them to express duration, flourishing and termination of human life.

That the grass image attempts to exploit the connotations of greenness as implying freshness and life is evident from the description of plant life when it is associated with the presence of moisture or water. “Greenery” connotes wetness – a green leaf was wet leaf, a wet leaf required a wet branch and a wet root. The imagery of the withering grass and unwatered trees emphasizes a sharp contrast between curse and blessing, and between dryness and wetness, between death and life. The parallelism between the drying of plants (i.e., the losing of moisture) and the fading away of human life is present within most of the OT references to grass. The emphasis is on the withering of grass. Expressions such as “like showers on the grass” (Mic 5:7) indicate the OT expression of the importance of water to grass. One may be right in arguing that the grass-withering imagery paints a portrait of a hopeless future for every person: The grass flourishes, the plants blossom, full of freshness and beauty, only to dry up the next moment, fall off and die.

The symbolism of the withering plant, finds its expression in human drying up. The connection between drying up and loss of vitality and life as part of the Israelites everyday experience may be the rationale for the association of ideas reflected by OT references to grass: drying up means loss of moisture which implies loss of life.

#### IV. Plant Imagery in Inter-testamental Literature

The Jewish literature of the intertestamental period also used this metaphor of God's people as his plants.<sup>42</sup> In the *Pss. Sol.* 14:3-5, Fujita sees the plants of the Lord as righteous Jews.<sup>43</sup> He observes that the righteous plants of God live only by receiving water from him, and the water that nourishes these plants of righteousness is the Law as implied in *Pss. Sol.* 14:2-3. Fujita adds that the renegade Jews, cut off from the source of living water, the Law, will wither and be plucked up.<sup>44</sup> Fujita locates his interpretations in the context of Jewish eschatology in which he sees the righteous Jews enjoying life. I agree with Fujita, arguing further, that if his interpretation of the metaphor of righteous plants in *Pss. Sol.* 14:3-5 is valid, then it can support the idea of dryness and death being understood as the plight of the unrighteous. Thus, there are also moral connotations in the designation of God's people as plant(s) in Jewish thought. YHWH keeps his righteous ones alive by watering them. The image involved here is attested also in Qumran literature:

4 I give [you] thanks, [Lord,] because you have set me at the source of streams in the dry land, at the spring of water in a parched land, 5 in a garden watered by channels [...] ... a plantation of cypresses and elms, together with cedars, for your glory. Trees of life in the secret source, hidden among all the trees at the water, which shall make a shoot grow in the everlasting plantation.<sup>45</sup>

As regards the "dry tree" symbolism of the death, it can be said that the DSS community had very little interest as far as can be discerned from their literature.

<sup>42</sup> Shozo Fujita discusses this extensively in his article 'The Metaphor of Plant in Jewish Literature of the Intertestamental Period', *JSJ* 17 (1976), pp. 30-45.

<sup>43</sup> Fujita, 'The Metaphor of Plant in Jewish Literature of the Intertestamental Period', pp. 30-45.

<sup>44</sup> Fujita, 'The Metaphor of Plant in Jewish Literature of the Intertestamental Period', pp. 30-45. cf. *Pss. Sol.* 3:11f; 14:9f.

<sup>45</sup> 1Q35 2; 4Q428 7. See Florentino Gracia Matfnez, and Eibert J.C. Tigchelaar (eds.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls*. Study Edition, vol. 1 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1998), p. 181.

What comes close to the interest of our study is the DSS's reference to the picture of the eternal plant as having been watered by the streams of Eden (1QH).<sup>46</sup>

Thus, both the OT and Inter-testamental Literature provide us with similes employing aspects of botany in language about human existence.

## V. Concluding Summary

In conclusion, this investigation yields an understanding that in OT thought the presence of fluids and moisture in the human/animal body and plants, is a synonym for life, while dryness is identified with death. A physiological interpretation of Ezekiel's vision lends support to this understanding. Ezek 37:1-14 is perhaps the most picturesque repository of the images of death and decay in the OT. However, amidst the litany of total death and hopelessness, the prophet assures God's people of a return to life. Though the image of the dry bones and the language of the "grave" may be metaphorical, the passage still presents a collective victory for the whole House of Israel over what may be described as "absolute national death", a national condition of hopelessness analogous to the experience of threading the corridors of Sheol.

The notions of dryness as death and wetness as life are evident in the OT and Jewish literature of the inter-testamental period as well. I may not have been able to exhaust all that could be said in this analysis of the texts on the significance of plant imagery in the OT. However, we have clearly located the plant-withering imagery in which moisture has a completely crucial function in that it is the principal metaphor for life. To borrow Nielsen's idea, whatever holds true for the plant, postulated via imagery, also holds true for human life,<sup>47</sup> especially in the context of our study, which emphasises the importance of moisture for life. Our discussion of plant imagery

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<sup>46</sup> See also Paul N. W. Swarup, 'An Eternal Plant, A House of Holiness: The Self-Understanding of the Dead Sea Scrolls Community', *TynBul* 54 (2003), p. 151-156. Swarup notes that the self-understanding of the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) community as the "Eternal Plant" enabled them to view themselves as the True Israel and the righteous and faithful remnant. The metaphor also enabled the community to identify themselves as the inheritors of the promises made to Abraham. There was also a universalistic dimension of the election of the people as the eternal plant, supported by the theme of the "World Tree".

<sup>47</sup> Nielsen, *There is Hope for a Tree*, p. 140. In her discussion of the political implications of the tree image, Nielsen observes that, "Whatever holds good within the code to which the tree belongs is also postulated, via the imagery, as holding good within the political code".

suggests a contrast between the flourishing green tree and the withering tree, a contrast between a wet plant and a dry plant. The imagery helps in understanding life in terms of the presence and absence of moisture.

In Israelite thought as expressed in the OT, one recognised simile for transience is expressed in the comparison of humans to grass. The fresh green grass is also wet and represents life and a flourishing experience; dry grass represents the end of a person's life. Isaiah makes this picture very clear in his reference to a stream in the territory of Moab: "the waters of Nimrim shall be desolate: for the hay is withered away, the grass fails, there is no green thing" (Isa 15:6). Human death is like a process of a plant's loss of water. When all the fluid/moisture is gone, death is complete. It is in this sense that plant-imagery is useful in illustrating the ultimate experience of all humankind. The physiological processes of botanic life in relation to plant fluids are a metaphor for the processes of human existence.

The whole scene of Ezek 37:1-14 has a parallel in the human-plant imagery. Dry bone and dry plants are symbols for human death. The provision of water maintains such marks of life as freshness, greenness and prosperity of plants; the רוח also revives the bones and the corpse. Our study has shown that, in relation to the bone-imagery of human life, רוח is to life what dryness is to death; in relation to the plant-imagery of human life, water is to life what dryness is to death. Both images serve to juxtapose moisture and death. Thus, this chapter, in suggesting that both water and spirit provide moisture for life, lends support to the OT theme of moisture being life.

Further inquiry would need to address the question of blood as a life-giving fluid in OT. In the OT, the view supporting the close association between blood and life is shown, not only by its use in sacrifices, but also by its application in other non-sacrificial blood rituals. The understanding of fluids as giving life to the body helps us a great deal in understanding blood, a body fluid, as a life-giving substance, even in its ritual application.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Blood, the Leper and the Corpse-Contaminated Person

#### I. Introduction

Previous chapters have shown the strong link between blood and life in physiological and metaphorical understandings. In the light of the preceding chapters, it is clear that loss of blood/fluid is death, but there are some hints (e.g., Homer) that restoration of blood may reverse the process of death. This idea has played little role in previous discussions of the ritual use of blood, where its disposal or application has widely been viewed in terms of simple cleansing/purification. However, it may be valuable to think more in terms of life and death. In this chapter we will examine the places where blood has traditionally been thought to “purify” to see whether the process is actually more one of giving life. This is clearest in the Red Heifer and “leper” rituals, which both, arguably, deal with the removal of “partial” death by the application of blood – although other factors are involved in each. Life is restored to dead skin or to one who is corpse-contaminated.

It is evident that the role of blood in the sacrificial system is harder to understand, although Milgrom’s theories have tended to suggest that it supports a more general purificatory function. We should not neglect the possibility that what is important here is not what the blood does to the altar, so much as what the altar does to the blood: the animal is rendered completely dead by exsanguination, but its life, still present in the blood, has to be disposed of properly and safely. The question of what role the altar plays in blood disposal is also noteworthy.

Animal blood was used in the ritual context by means of both sacrificial and non-sacrificial blood rites. One significant case of blood rite that involves the application of blood both to the body and to the altar is the rite of restoring the

Israelite with a skin disorder, the *מצרע*, into the camp and the sanctuary. The *מצרע* is very significant for our study because of the Israelite perception of the *מצרע* as being akin to a dead body. This suggests that the restoration of the *מצרע* to life (physically, socially or cultically) by means of blood rite lends support to my thesis that in OT thought, blood as moisture is not the life of the physical body only when it is in the body, but it is also employed in rituals to restore life to the seemingly “dead body”. This implies that blood does not die even when the body from which it was obtained is dead. The blood rite for the *מצרע* divides into two categories according to the object of the application of the blood. It is applied both to the altar at the sanctuary and to the body of the *מצרע*. Of the two blood rites involving application of blood to the body, the first is performed outside the sanctuary, while the second takes place within the sanctuary.

This chapter begins with the description of the various blood rites prescribed for the purification of the *מצרע*. What follows is an exploration of the clues to the nature of the *מצרע* ritual that may be furnished by the red heifer rite. I will then outline the similarities and differences between the slain-bird rite in the *מצרע* ritual and the red heifer rite to see how both rite supports the point I am trying to make, that blood ritually restores life to the dead in general - particularly to the dead flesh when blood is directly applied to it. A focus on the blood rites that go along with the OT sacrifices, which are part of the rite to reincorporate the cured *מצרע*, namely *עלה*, *חטאת* and *אשם*, will help in considering why the blood is assigned to the altar on behalf of the *מצרע*. Perhaps, besides the concept of contagion, there is an alternative implication of the expression “blood is life” (Lev 17:10-14), which underlies the practice of blood rite on the altar. However, we will not go into details with that discussion.

## II. Blood on the Body: The מצרע-reincorporation Ritual

### (1) Description of צרעת

The OT term צרעת, a “smiting”, a “stroke”, is commonly referred to as “leprosy” in the English versions of the Bible. The term “leprosy” is from the Greek λέπρα, by which the Greek physicians designated the disease from its “scaliness”. צרעת is a skin disorder which made a person very unattractive and miserable. The מצרע was isolated because he was contagious by touch and unclean for worship. We have the description of צרעת, with its corresponding regulations, in Lev 13 and 14; Num 12:10-15, etc. This skin condition might become apparent under various circumstances: without any apparent cause (Lev 13:2-8); as a reappearance (Lev 13:9-17); from an inflammation (Lev 13: 18-28); on the head or chin (Lev 13:29-37); in white polished spots (Lev 13: 38, 39); at the back or in the front of the head (Lev 13:40-44).

To what skin disorder did צרעת refer to in the OT? The term צרעת is not a precise medical term for a specific disease. Rather, it seems to refer to a whole range of disfiguring skin conditions that resulted in rejection by Israelite society. Today, leprosy is an infectious condition called “Hansen’s disease”. Leprosy causes severe nerve damage in the extremities and the eventual loss of hands, feet and more. We do not know whether צרעת may have included what is known today as Hansen’s disease or not. The common form of leprosy in the OT is a white variety, which covers either the whole body or a large tract of the surface of the skin. Examples of such are the cases of Moses, Miriam, Naaman and Gehazi (Exod 4:6; Num 12:10; 2 Kgs 5:1, 20-27). In Exod 4:6, one finds a person with a hand “leprous and white as snow”. In Lev 13:10, 20, צרעת results in the hair turning white. Since Hansen’s disease does not cause the skin to become white, it is clear that certain references to צרעת in the OT obviously refer to conditions other than Hansen’s disease. However, such conditions as leucaderma or vitiligo cause a whitening of the skin and therefore may be confused with leprosy.



The affliction **צִרְעָה** also had a religious connotation. In certain places in the OT, **צִרְעָה** is associated with sin and could be attributed to punishment from God. Reference can be made in this context to the punishment suffered by Miriam (Num 12:9), and also King Uzziah (2 Chr 26:16-21). However, Maccoby rightly notes that in Lev 13, there is no trace of this moralistic approach.<sup>1</sup> He argues that the non-moral nature of **צִרְעָה** is shown in the fact that it does not affect only humans but fabrics and houses as well.<sup>2</sup>

The **מִצְרֵעַ** was to tear his clothes and leave them torn, let his hair hang loose or leave his head bare and put a covering on his upper lip. That **צִרְעָה** could also affect clothing and leather garments (Lev 13:37-48), suggests that it may have been a kind of mildew. The condition of **צִרְעָה** could even affect walls of buildings (Lev 14:37). Garments infected with **צִרְעָה** and the spreading plague were to be burnt. The priest as well as the **מִצְרֵעַ** had many ritualistic requirements for dealing with the condition. Lev 13 discusses the diagnosis of the **מִצְרֵעַ**, while Lev 14 discusses the cleansing of the cured **מִצְרֵעַ**, which was a responsibility of the priests.

## (2) The **מִצְרֵעַ**: Dead and Contagious

Leprosy made a person waste away like a corpse. The association of death and leprosy is clear in Aaron's description of Miriam leprosy: "Do not let her be like the dead one when it goes out from its mother's womb and its flesh half eaten away" (Num 12:12).

Maccoby is right in his observation that nothing is said about impurity caused by the **מִצְרֵעַ** in Leviticus.<sup>3</sup> However, it is clear that the **מִצְרֵעַ**, being unclean, had to be excluded from the camp in order to avoid communication of impurity by contact within the camp. The **מִצְרֵעַ** was unclean according to the Law and could associate

<sup>1</sup> Hyam Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality: The Ritual Purity System and its Place in Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 120, 121. He observes that "leprosy" in Lev 13 is just something that happens to people, or cloth or houses. According to Maccoby, the priestly authors of Lev 13 did not see 'leprosy' as a matter of sin at all, but rather only of impurity that might threaten the sanctity of the Temple.

<sup>2</sup> Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality*, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality*, p. 121.

with no one except others who shared in his plight. Therefore the *מצרע* was required to live outside the camp (Num. 5:1-4; 12:10-15), and was to live alone (Lev 13:46). To approach a *מצרע* was to be unclean yourself. The *מצרע* was obliged to cover his upper lips and warn away all who would have come close to him by crying out, "Unclean, unclean!"<sup>4</sup>

One common element shared by the *מצרע* and the *נפש מת* (dead person) is the similarity in their bodily phenomena.<sup>5</sup> That the *מצרע* was dead was clear in Israelite understanding. Miriam, the sister of Moses rebelled and was consequently punished with *צרעת*. Her condition was compared to one stillborn (Num 12: 9-15; Deut 24:8-9). The analogy between the *מצרע* and a dead foetus underlies the treatment of the *מצרע* as an outcast in the Israelite society.<sup>6</sup> Being akin to a dead person, the *מצרע* had to withdraw from normal activities of life, both social and cultic.<sup>7</sup>

The life/death metaphor is a spatial one. It is a physical separation between the dead and the living. It was "cultically" unacceptable for the unclean to enter the sphere of the holy. If the impure condition of the *מצרע* images that of the corpse,<sup>8</sup> as also is demonstrated in both cases by separation from ritual activities in sacred space, then "life" in a ritual sense means possessing the right of access to sacred space.

<sup>4</sup> One rabbinic interpretation notes that the cry of the *מצרע* was a warning to avoid incurring impurity from the *מצרע*. See b Mo'ed Qatan 5b. The fear to get closer to the leper was real in Talmudic times: one could not go four cubits to the east of the *מצרע*, according to R. Yohanan. But R. Simeon b. Laqish said that four cubits referred to a time when the wind was not blowing, one had to be a hundred cubits away when the wind was blowing (Lev. R 16:3).

<sup>5</sup> See P. P. Jenson, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World* (ISOTSup, 106; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), p. 141. Jenson compares the skin disorder (Lev 13-14) with death (Num. 19) and notes a similarity in their (i) character as major impurity, (ii) being spatially outside the camp, (iii) defiling what is under the same roof (Lev 14:46 cf Num 19:14), (iv) ritual of clothes-renting, (v) hair appearing dishevelled, and (vi) purification ritual involving the use of hyssop, scarlet, cedar-wood. See also G. Lewis, 'A Lesson from Leviticus', *Man* NS 22 (1987), pp. 593-612; T. Frymer-Kensky, 'Pollution, Purification and Purgation in Biblical Israel', in C.L. Meters and M. O'Connor eds., *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of his Sixtieth Birthday* (Winona Lake, IN: ASOR/ Eisenbrauns, 1983), p. 400.

<sup>6</sup> Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality*, 119, observes that the "leper" is one who is torn away from life in untimely fashion like a stillborn child".

<sup>7</sup> Jenson, *Graded Holiness*, p. 139; says the same about the corpse-contaminated person.

<sup>8</sup> Jenson, *Graded Holiness*, p. 167). Jenson notes the centrality of death to the idea of impurity.

Death is characterised fundamentally by separation. The **מצרע** had to be separated from the camp in order that he may not contaminate it (Lev 13:44). Conditions that imitate death, like that of the **מצרע**, call for separation by way of exclusion from society and the cult.<sup>9</sup> This is a spatial alienation that separates the dead from the source of life, that is, from God's presence in the sanctuary.

It must be borne in mind that in Israelite thinking, the **מצרע** is akin to the corpse. The basic difference between them is that the **מצרע** is a living being capable of being cured of the skin condition and eventually, of being ritually restored to life, while the corpse cannot be thought of in the same way.<sup>10</sup> The **מצרע** was perceived as being capable of communicating severe impurity because he was "dead"; he became dead before he became impure. Thus, the **מצרע** requires a restoration to life in order to be pure, and not purification in order to be alive. This leads to the question of what blood in the ritual of the cured **מצרע** in Lev 14 is all about.

### (3) Brief Description of the **מצרע**-rites

It has been demonstrated that among the Israelites, the **מצרע** was a constant source of contagion and therefore was separated from the midst of the people. However, it is rather intriguing that the blood-rite brings cleansing and re-incorporation to the cured **מצרע**. Though the OT is silent on how the healing occurs, it is obvious that neither the blood itself nor the ritual had anything to do with the healing of the skin disorder. Milgrom suggests that the **מצרע** was healed by the grace of God, "and the rite only provides for the elimination of ritual impurity and not physical impurity".<sup>11</sup> The priest simply was required to go outside of the camp, the legitimate place for the **מצרע**, and inspect whether the **נגע-צרעת** (the plague of **צרעת**) has been healed (Lev 14:2-3). If the **מצרע** was found healed, then on the first day, outside the camp, the priest required

<sup>9</sup> I describe these conditions as *imitatio mortis* in the sense of "living death".

<sup>10</sup> Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality*, p. 148. Maccoby observes that the power of contamination of the **מצרע** is biblically far less than that of the corpse.

<sup>11</sup> J. Milgrom, 'The Paradox of the Red Cow', VT 31 (1981), pp. 62-72.

two living clean birds, and cedar-wood, and scarlet, and hyssop.<sup>12</sup> On the final day, various rites were performed within the sanctuary in order to cleanse the healed *מצרע*.

The ritual for the cleansing of a person cured of *צרעת* (skin disorder) is recorded in its entirety in Lev 14:1-32.<sup>13</sup> In these rituals, blood features prominently. There are three stages to the ritual of re-incorporation of the *מצרע* for full participation in Israelite society. Each of these rituals effected cleansing for the *מצרע* (Lev 14:8, 9, 20). This three-stage ritual occurred on three separate days. The first day, the seventh and the eighth day. In this section of the chapter we will explore the rituals on the first and eighth days because of the blood elements in them.

On the first day, outside the camp, one bird was slaughtered and the other set free. The slaying of the bird was performed in an earthen vessel over running water. The priest then dipped cedar-wood, scarlet, hyssop and the living bird in the blood of the slain bird over the running water. The crimson yarn and the cedar contributed by their red colour to, as it were, enhancing the reddening of the blood-water mixture, thereby symbolically intensifying the potency of the mixture.<sup>14</sup> The hyssop functioned as a ceremonial brush to distribute the droplets of blood-mixture on the object to be purified, in this case, the body of the *מצרע*. The priest sprinkled this blood-water mixture seven times upon the healed *מצרע* that was to be cleansed from the *צרעת*, and pronounced him clean.<sup>15</sup> The clothes of the *מצרע* were washed; all the hair was shaved; and finally, he bathed in water (vv. 1-8). Then followed a week of waiting.

The seventh day began the second stage of the re-incorporation ceremony. On this day the purification ritual of the first day was repeated, this time outside the tent (v. 9). The *מצרע* shaved off all the hair on his body; he washed his clothes, bathed his flesh in water, and became clean (Lev 14:9). He was now prepared for the final

<sup>12</sup> See Milgrom, 'The Paradox of the Red Cow', pp. 62-72. Milgrom observes that the mixtures, which purify the *מצרע* and the corpse-contaminated, are the exact same composition.

<sup>13</sup> The Mishnic Tractate, *Negaim*, contains details on the subject of *צרעת*.

<sup>14</sup> In the rite of the slain-bird (Lev 14), the scarlet wool may have been used to tie together the cedar-wood and the hyssop to make a sprinkling device. See John E Hartley, *Leviticus* (WBC 4; Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1992), p. 195. Even so the contact of such a device with the blood/water mixture would still have enhanced the "bloodness" (redness) of the mixture.

<sup>15</sup> See Herbert J. Levine, *Sing Unto God A New Song: A Commentary Reading of the Psalms* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 5.

stage, which occurred on the following day. The blood ritual of the eighth day reinforced the life-giving power of the blood ritual of the first day.

Finally, on the eighth day the priest brought the healed *מצרע* before YHWH at the door of the tent of meeting to be cleansed. For this was required two he-lambs without blemish, one ewe-lamb of the first year without blemish, and three-tenth parts of an ephah of fine flour for a meal-offering, mingled with oil, and one log of oil. The cleansing ceremony of the eighth day is very elaborate (Lev 14:12-20). Its significance is indicated by the fact that with the exception of the peace offering, all other important offerings were required, namely the *חטאת* offering, the *אשם* (reparation) offering, the *חטאת* (purification) offering and *עלה* (burnt) offering. The last three offerings involved blood manipulation. With the *עלה* and the *אשם*, the blood was flung around the altar. In the case of a *חטאת* for the priest or the whole congregation, some of the blood was initially sprinkled seven times before the veil and then daubed on the horns of the incense altar in the Holy Place.<sup>16</sup> The priest poured the remainder at the base of the altar of the Outer Court. Whether for the ruler or commoner, the *חטאת* offering required that some of the blood be applied to the horns of the altar and the rest poured out at the base of the altar. The *מצרע* seems to belong to the category of the commoner and therefore it is obvious that the blood of his *חטאת* offering was manipulated solely at the altar of the Outer Court.

#### **(4) The Bird-Rites Outside the Camp**

The former *מצרע* was not yet, as it were, fully “alive” even after his healing, and therefore needed a life-affirming ritual that involved blood in order to transfer him from the state of “deadness” and exclusion to new life and inclusion into the camp. The performance of the ritual blood sprinkling of the *מצרע* and the dispatch of the live bird (scape-bird), wet with blood, indicate the belief that there was a need, respectively, for the cleansing of the *מצרע* and the removal of impurity even after the

<sup>16</sup> Gary A. Anderson, ‘Sacrifice and Sacrificial; Offerings (OT)’, *ABD* 5.879. Anderson observes, that ‘the blood used for the sin of the priest or of the community as a whole is placed within the sanctuary itself’, while the blood used for the commoner is placed on the altar of burnt offering.

healing of the *מצרע*.<sup>17</sup> It must be noted that the initial stage of the purification of the *מצרע* (Lev 14:4-7), that is, the blood ritual of the first day, cannot be described as a sacrifice.<sup>18</sup> The ritual took place outside the camp and not on the altar within the sanctuary. The blood-water mixture was sprinkled on the body of the *מצרע*, who had now been healed, in preparation for his admission into society. Having undergone the sanctification ritual of blood-sprinkling, he washed his clothes, shaved off all hair, and bathed in water, and he was deemed to be clean. After that he entered the camp, but stayed outside his tent for seven days.

The scape-bird discharged into the open field, removed far from the sanctuary, the *מצרע*-impurity absorbed by the blood into which it has been dipped (Lev 14:6-7; 51-53).<sup>19</sup> This reversal of the condition of deadness entailed the symbolic transfer of the *מצרע* from death to life. The *מצרע* now had access to the camp. Both this dispatch-rite and the blood-sprinkling rite of the slain-bird were a means of reversing the *מצרע*'s social alienation from the camp. Davies sees this initial stage as an elimination ritual symbolizing the passage from impurity and death to purity and life.<sup>20</sup> This leads to re-inclusion into the public domain by means of the blood-water ritual.

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<sup>17</sup> It was because the healing had taken place already that the performance of the cleansing ritual was needed. See C. F. Kiel, *Commentary of the Old Testament*, vol 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), p. 385. Like Kiel, I find it unconvincing that this dispatch ritual symbolised the former *מצרע*'s release from his disease.

<sup>18</sup> J. Milgrom, *Studies in Cultic Theology and Terminology* (SJLA, 36; Leiden: Brill, 1983), p. 90.

<sup>19</sup> N. Micklem, *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol 2 (New York: Abingdon Press, 1953), p. 69. According to Micklem, the escaping bird brought home to the leper the bearing away of his uncleanness. For some scholars, like North, the release of the live bird represents an ancient idea of transferring uncleanness to animals; C. R. North, *Leviticus* (Abingdon Bible Commentary; New York: Abingdon Press, 1929), p. 287. Cate believes it is symbolic of new freedom for the *מצרע*, R. L. Cate, *Teacher's Bible Commentary, Leviticus* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1972), p. 87. There is a relation of this ritual to the scapegoat analogy in which a goat carried the sins of Israel away into the wilderness.

<sup>20</sup> Davies makes effective use of the rite of passage model in the case of the rehabilitation of the *מצרע*. See Douglas Davies, 'An Interpretation of Sacrifice in Leviticus', *ZAW* 89 (1977), pp. 387-399 (repr., in *Anthropological Approaches to the Old Testament* (B. Lang ed.; London: SPCK, 1985), pp. 151-162.

**(5) Blood-daubing rite: The אֲשָׁם Offering**

The אֲשָׁם offering is described either as “guilt offering” or “reparation offering”.<sup>21</sup> It has been said that, among all the offerings of the priestly system, the אֲשָׁם is the most difficult to understand.<sup>22</sup> It is debatable whether the אֲשָׁם is a sacrifice or not.<sup>23</sup> Milgrom suggests that the מִצְרַע must bring an אֲשָׁם because he suspects the מִצְרַע may have offended the deity. Milgrom is arguing from silence here since the OT is silent on any offence committed by the cured מִצְרַע which called for the אֲשָׁם offering.

In the opinion of Lemardelé, if one should consider the מִצְרַע not merely as an impure person, but as a victim of a divine curse, then the significance of the אֲשָׁם could be explained by an urgency to appease YHWH.<sup>24</sup> He believes the אֲשָׁם blood should have a prophylactic function different from the apotropaic function, which is present in the sacrifice of purification.<sup>25</sup> One interesting observation of the אֲשָׁם sacrifice which distinguishes it from other sacrifices is the fact that it can be converted to a monetary equivalent and paid.<sup>26</sup> But it appears in the case of the מִצְרַע, the אֲשָׁם was paid, so to speak, because the blood was needed for the rite of daubing the extremities of the body of the cured מִצְרַע.

Very significant for our discussion here is the blood of the אֲשָׁם, which was daubed on the extremities of the body of the former מִצְרַע. The blood of the אֲשָׁם

<sup>21</sup> For further discussion on the אֲשָׁם bearing connotations of reparation or compensation, see N. H. Snaith, ‘The Sin-offering and the Guilt Offering’, *VT* 15 (1965), pp. 73-80.

<sup>22</sup> Gary Anderson, ‘Sacrifice’, *ABD* 5.880.

<sup>23</sup> B. A. Levine proposes a non-sacrificial origin of the אֲשָׁם, basing his argument on I Sam 5:1-7:1 regarding the episode of the Philistines and the ark. B. Levine, *In the Presence of the Lord: A Study of the Cult and Some Cultic Terms in Ancient Israel* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), pp. 91-94. However, Milgrom disagrees with Levine, suggesting that what Levine refers to here might be a desacrilization of sacred objects (Lev 5:15). See Milgrom, *Cult and Conscience, The Asham and Priestly Doctrine of Repentance*, pp. 142-143.

<sup>24</sup> Christophe Lemardelé, ‘Une Solution pour le ’āšām du Lépreux’, *VT* 54 (2004), pp. 208-215.

<sup>25</sup> Lemardelé, ‘Une Solution pour le Asam du Lépreux’, pp. 208-215. Lemardelé sees the אֲשָׁם and חַטָּאת as two very distinct expiatory sacrifices.

<sup>26</sup> Anderson, ‘Sacrifice’, p. 880.



was needed for the ritual prescribed for the purification of the **מִצְרַע** (Lev 14:14, 25).<sup>27</sup> The priest killed the male lamb in the sanctuary. He then took the **אֵשֶׁם**-blood (blood of guilt offering), and put it upon the tip of the right ear of the healed **מִצְרַע** and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot. After the priest had sprinkled the oil with his finger seven times before YHWH, he took the rest of the oil, put it on the tip of the right ear of him that was to be cleansed, and upon the thumb of his right hand, and upon the big toe of his right foot, but this time on the **אֵשֶׁם**-blood.<sup>28</sup> That the blood here is applied to the body may make some scholars find it difficult to describe this ritual as a sacrifice that effects atonement in the sense of purgation for the **מִצְרַע**'s body.

Levine, discussing the basis on which the **אֵשֶׁם** was required for the **מִצְרַע**, observes that we have in Lev 14:1-32 a prophylactic purification rite in which blood and oil are used to immunize a person against the forces of impurity.<sup>29</sup> Proposing an explanation of the **אֵשֶׁם** rite for the **מִצְרַע**, he notes: "an 'āšām was prescribed just as a ram of investiture was ordained for the prophylaxis of the invested priests".<sup>30</sup> Clearly, the context of the ceremony indicates that the **אֵשֶׁם**-blood here could have been nothing more than a consecration fluid.<sup>31</sup>

Milgrom notes that the **אֵשֶׁם** is the key sacrifice in the ritual complex for the purification of the **מִצְרַע**.<sup>32</sup> He notes that it was imperative for the **מִצְרַע**, as part of his ritual of rehabilitation with his community and God, to bring an **אֵשֶׁם** to cover the contingency that his unwitting trespass upon sacred objects of the sanctuary brought on his disease.<sup>33</sup> Milgrom saw the **אֵשֶׁם**-blood as contributing in purifying the **מִצְרַע**. One will therefore notice that Milgrom saw **אֵשֶׁם** as an expiation rite. It is rather

<sup>27</sup> J. Milgrom, *Cult and Conscience: The Asham and the Priestly Doctrine of Repentance* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), p. 143.

<sup>28</sup> Both the oil and the blood are symbols of life. See Levine, *Sing Unto God A New Song*, p. 45. Levine describes the oil and the blood as life juices of the vegetable and animal realms.

<sup>29</sup> Levine, *In the Presence of the Lord*, 1974, p. 111.

<sup>30</sup> Levine, *In the Presence of the Lord*, 1974, p. 111.

<sup>31</sup> The oil was another liquid that had the same function of sanctifying the **מִצְרַע**.

<sup>32</sup> Milgrom, *Cult*, p. 81. As to the question of why the **מִצְרַע** should bring an **אֵשֶׁם** (Lev 14:12, 21), Milgrom argues that it is because he may have desecrated the sacred objects of the sanctuary.

<sup>33</sup> Milgrom, *Cult*, p. 80.



interesting that the term **כפר** appears in the blood-and-oil rite for the cured **מצרע** (Lev 14: 18, 20, 29, 31), suggesting that the blood of the **אשם** has some atoning functions. Milgrom thinks the **כפר** function here should be rendered by the abstract notion “to expiate”.<sup>34</sup> Porter believes the **אשם**-blood rite is a purificatory rite, in the case of the rite required for the cured **מצרע**. He observes that “the ear, thumb and big toe, the top, middle and bottom, of the human frame, symbolise that the entire person is cleansed when the purifying blood is applied to them.”<sup>35</sup>

The blood-oil rite in the **אשם**-ritual procedure for the **מצרע** (Lev 14:14-18) is reminiscent of the blood-oil rite employed in the consecration of Aaronic priests. (Exod 29:19-21; Lev 8:22-30). The consecration of Aaron and his sons employs the same anointing rite, which daubs the blood of the ram of consecration on the tip of their right ear, the thumbs of their right hands, and the big toes of their right feet. Moses sprinkled the blood upon the altar round about (Lev 8:22-24). In the rite separating them unto YHWH,<sup>36</sup> they were first washed with water (Lev 8:6). They then put on special garments. Moses anointed Aaron with oil (Lev 8:7-13) after consecrating the tabernacle. He offered three sacrifices, namely, the **עלה**-bull, **עלה**-ram and **מזל**-ram (Lev 8:14-29). He sprinkled the anointing oil and blood on Aaron and his sons and their clothing as well (Lev 8:30). Aaron and his sons remained in the sanctuary for seven days (Lev 8:33-35). During this period the priests stayed in the tabernacle day and night and went through the same rituals and offered the same sacrifice for seven days (Lev 8:33-35; Exod 29:35-37).

After Moses and Aaron had blessed the people, the glory of YHWH appeared (Lev 9:22-23). YHWH sent fire to burn up the sacrifices and the people shouted and lay prostrate (Lev 9:24). This was how the sons of Aaron were ordained as priests to serve in YHWH's sanctuary. The symbols of life in this rite are blood, water and oil,

<sup>34</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New translation and Commentary* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1991), p. 1081. For the views of others on blood and expiation, see A. Schenker, ‘koper et expiation’, *Bib* 63 (1982), p. 32-46; L. Sabourin, ‘Nefesh, sang et expiation (Lev 17. 11,14)’, *Sciences Ecclésiastiques* 18 (1966) 25-45; Dennis J. McCarthy, ‘The Symbolism of Blood and Sacrifice’, *JBL* 88 (1969), p. 166-176, and in idem, ‘Further Notes on the Symbolism of Blood and Sacrifice’, *JBL*, 92 (1973), p. 205-210.

<sup>35</sup> J. R. Porter, *Leviticus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 67.

<sup>36</sup> See also Exod 28-29

but blood is the dominant symbol - the life-symbol *par excellence*. The symbolic dominance of blood in the whole ordination ritual is very significant. The blood rites involved in the *חטאת*, *עלה* and *מלאים* sacrifices offered on the first day, and the *חטאת*, *עלה* and *שלמים* sacrifices of the seventh day, were all meant to cleanse the altar on behalf of both the priests and people, before the bodies of the animals were either burned or eaten.

During the ordination rite, *חטאת*-blood was sprinkled on the altar (Lev 8:15), the priests and their garments, an action understood by some scholars as purification.<sup>37</sup> The sprinkling of the blood and anointing oil together upon the bodies and garments of the priests brought the rite of consecration to completion. Just as the priests were admitted closer to YHWH in the blood-oil rite in Lev 8 on the occasion of their investiture, so the blood-oil rite was required in the fresh admission of the individual *מצרע* closer to YHWH". Wetting the extremities of the *מצרע* with the *אשם*-blood brought resumption of normal life to the *מצרע*, consecrating him or her for access to religious activity within the sanctuary, though it did not set him apart for ministry. However, though this rite of daubing the extremities of *מצרע*'s body with blood is similar to that of the ordination of the priest, the *מצרע*'s cultic status was in no way equal to that of the priest.

Any full discussion of the *מצרע*-ritual will necessitate a detailed discussion of the symbols involved, namely, blood, oil and water. Despite the interrelated nature of these symbols, I single out blood for detailed analysis given its dominant status in the numerous other rites discussed in this thesis.

#### (6) Blood and the *מצרע*'s Skin Colour

In diagnosing *צרעת*, the appearance of the skin becomes very significant. Included in the signs that the priest must watch for on the skin are a swelling and a scab. Lev 13 also declares that any bright spot or scale shall be pronounced *צרעת*, if it be found to spread abroad over the body (Lev 13:28, 29, 36, 37). The sore is considered *צרעת* if the hair on the sore has turned white (Lev 13:3, 4, 10, 20, 25, 26) or yellow (Lev

<sup>37</sup> See e.g., Jenson, *Graded Holiness*, p. 121.

13:30, 32, 36), and the sore appears to be deeper than the skin of one's body (Lev 13:2-3).

Significant for this discussion is the white colouration of the skin. The priest is required to watch for white swellings on the skin and hair turned white (Lev 13:10-11, 16-17) in order to pronounce the skin disorder *צִרְעָה*. The paradox of the white skin is that, if the *צִרְעָה* covers the whole body, and the whole body has turned white, then the *מִצְרַע* must be pronounced clean (Lev 13:12-13, 17, 39). Otherwise, where raw flesh appears on the skin with a white spot, the *מִצְרַע* is unclean (Lev 13:10, 14, 15). White or reddish-white spots and white hairs are marks of *צִרְעָה* and uncleanness where they are related to sores on the skin (Lev 13:19, 24, 42, 49).

According to Leviticus, a pure body is marked with either all-whiteness or no-whiteness. This idea appears to be in contrast with what appears in other descriptions of *צִרְעָה* in the OT where whiteness of the whole body means the presence of *צִרְעָה*. There are two other cases where, in the description of the *מִצְרַע*, they are spoken of as being as "white as snow" (Num 12:10; 2 Kgs 5:27). In the context where whiteness, of part of the body or the whole body, designates *צִרְעָה*, the colour "white" can be employed to connote "death" because of the dead condition of the *מִצְרַע*. In such a sense, "whiteness" (and even "reddish-white") contrasts with redness, as death contrasts with life.<sup>38</sup> In this context, the use of blood and other red elements in the ritual relating to the removal of the "impurity of the dead body" (corpse-contamination and *מִצְרַע*-contamination), suggests that redness, symbolising life, reverses the death symbolism of "whiteness". The *מִצְרַע* whose whole body has turned white is clean and does not need purification. My argument here may also suggest, in the context of the *מִצְרַע*'s condition as presented in the OT, that whiteness is to death as redness is to life. It must be noted that Lev 13 does not indicate that whiteness of the *מִצְרַע*'s body means life has returned to the *מִצְרַע*. What is implied in the diagnosis is that such a sign indicates "not *צִרְעָה*". In any case, we see a

<sup>38</sup> The mixture of red and white spots on the skin representing *צִרְעָה* and uncleanness, and the acceptance of the "all-whiteness" of the skin as cleanness, may have to do with the avoidance of mixture of colours.

paradox in the whiteness of the *מצרע*'s skin – it represents both the presence and the absence of leprosy, impurity and death.

We may suggest that, blood ritually applied on the whole-white or spotty-white body of the *מצרע* artificially introduces life into deadness. This is another way of looking at my view that the slain-bird rite and the *אשם*-blood rite, both involving the direct application of blood to the body of the *מצרע*, are primarily about ritual giving of life by way of applying fluids of life to the so called “dead living” person.

#### **(7) *מצרע*-rite: A Passage from Life to Death**

In Chapter 1, I discussed the nature of culture as a symbolic system in which ideas and values are expressed through different kinds of categories of things. To clarify my point, let us consider this question; what happened when an Israelite cut his finger? Did he have a “practical” classification of “action” – a kind of “first aid” treatment for his finger? It is likely he did. But when it came to matters of life and death as well as spiritual or ritual matters, he categorized things differently. In Israelite culture, the classification of participants and non-participants is clear. For example, the *מצרע* was classified as “dead”, unclean, a non-participant in social life. There was something wrong in his body that made him socially unfit. It was the manipulation of blood along with water that made it possible for the *מצרע* to return to both physical and social purity, to physical life and to normality as a full participant in both social and cultic life.

Van Gennep's and Victor Turner's ideas about rites of passage become significant here. Something similar happened in the case of the restoration of the cured *מצרע*. In the first place, the *מצרע* had been healed before the purification ritual began. It was now up to him to make the effort to enter a new relationship with his community and God. He was healed but not fully whole; otherwise he would have no need for all the rites lined up for him. In a sense, he was healed but not yet fully alive. He would return to life in a gradual process involving blood and water rites. Both symbols of life would have to be employed either together or separately in

effecting full life that will give him the license to full community and cultic participation.

Through the blood-rites, the *מצרע* gradually assumes the new identity of a pure person, and gradually returns to life. Thus, the cured *מצרע* narratives embody the underlying structure of ritual; separation, liminality and reincorporation. The passages focus not only on the cured *מצרע*'s desire of being reincorporated into the community, but also on the emotions of the uncured *מצרע*; his cry, "unclean, unclean" reiterates the individual's need for rescue, recovery and return to life (Lev 13:45). Thus these passages tend to emphasise the experience of being on a threshold between death and life, sickness and recovery, being a non-participant and a participant, being absent and present in community.

The practices at various stages of the ritual are significant in many ways. Initially, the cured *מצרע* appears on the threshold of the camp, then blood ritual moves him a step inside the camp for a week, but he remains on the threshold of the sanctuary. In other words, nothing of him can enter the sanctuary until the final (or eighth) day, when the final and more elaborate blood ritual at the altar of burnt offering consummates his new identity as a participant in God's community. There are also emotional thresholds to cross as the cured *מצרע* moves from outside the camp into the presence of the sanctuary. He used to be an insider before his impurity and "death" caused him to be separated and moved outside the camp. The significant fact is that whatever the nature of the threshold, whether spatial, temporal or emotional, blood ritual hosts a smooth crossing, a return from death to life. Thus Gorman is right in seeing the condition of *צרעת* as a passage into the realm of death, and the ritual as a return.<sup>39</sup>

May I also note that it takes time to return to life. The return of the *מצרע* to life must be understood not as an instant experience, but rather as a graded re-entry. It

<sup>39</sup> Frank H. Gorman, Jr., *Space, Time and Status in the Priestly Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), p. 175. Drawing on Taylor's suggestion that ritual symbols condense and unify a number of often polarized meanings, Gorman notes that the blood is appropriately a symbol of both life and death.<sup>39</sup> Gorman notes that a bird must be killed in order to acquire new life, but that killing paradoxically marks the restoration of life to the cured leper. See Gorman, Jr., *Space, Time and Status in the Priestly Theology*, 168.

is a process that lingers on until all the required blood rituals of purification at the altar have been performed. Though the *מצרע* is cured of *צרעת*, it is still dead. The initial blood ritual, a ritual of blood transmission outside the camp, begins the process of revivification. The final ritual completes the process. It is a gradual return to life, demonstrated by a step-by-step spatial movement from outside the camp into the camp and then after a week, from the camp into the vicinity of the sanctuary. The movement of the healed *מצרע* from death to life has spatial dimensions that begin and end in blood rituals. Here again, blood manipulation determines a positive status change: a translation from a *topos* and condition of death to life. It is a process by which ritually wetting a “dead” body with blood restores life to the body; the blood manipulation makes it possible for the socially dead *מצרע* to find his way back to life in the community of the clean and to the cultic space which symbolises the presence of God, the ultimate source and giver of life.

The offerings, namely the *אשם*, *חטאת* and *עלה*, are meant also for atonement for the *מצרע*, in order that he may be clean, but they have to do with the cleansing of the altar on behalf of the *מצרע* because of the harm his impurity had caused to the sanctuary. The more significant point here is that the blood of the various sacrifices made atonement for the sacred appurtenances in the sanctuary on behalf of the *מצרע* and for the body of the *מצרע*, granting him a cultic status, which gave him access to the precincts of the sanctuary, that is, to the sphere of life. For example, the *חטאת* offering may not have cleansed the *מצרע* himself but rather it purged the sanctuary on behalf of the *מצרע* on whose account the sanctuary became unclean.<sup>40</sup> The *חטאת*-blood therefore became a ritual agent in the reversal of the *מצרע*'s alienation from the sanctuary.

<sup>40</sup> Milgrom, 'Israel's Sanctuary: The Priestly "Picture of Dorian Gray"', pp. 390-99. Milgrom sees the *חטאת* blood as a ritual detergent, the authorized purgative of the sanctuary.

### III. The Rite of the Red Heifer

In relation to the dangerous nature of the corpse, we may suggest, by referring to our argument from previous chapters regarding the physiological significance of the loss of body fluids that the decaying corpse discharged, that this body discharge was a reminder of a movement from life toward death. The contact with the corpse associated a person with the dead and therefore, presumably, the corpse-contaminated person also become impure like the dead body, thereby sharing in the condition of death.

In OT purity system, the presence of the corpse and objects associated with it is potent enough to contaminate the sanctuary or the tabernacle (Num 5:2-4; 19:13, 20). For example, contact with the human corpse is a major source of impurity (Numbers 19). Thus, death symbolism is an underlying principle behind the Israelite system of impurity. According to Jacob Milgrom, corpse contamination “evoked an obsessive irrational fear in individuals”.<sup>41</sup> This popular ancient Israelite belief that contact with a corpse produced the uncleanness necessitated some form of the ritual process of cleansing. The passage in Num 19:1-22 deals with impurity resulting from contact with a dead body, human bones and graves. It suggests an Israelite religious belief in which it was readily thinkable that contamination from a corpse could be removed from a person through contact with the ashes of the red heifer.

The rite was performed at a distance from the tabernacle. Its origin is obscure.<sup>42</sup> The intention of the rite described here is to make possible a return to a state of purity, as indicated by the words, חטאת הוא, which may be translated as, “it is for purification” (Num 19:9). This suggests that the red heifer rite is a purification rite.<sup>43</sup> But is this the only function of the rite? Do not the elements of the ashes,

<sup>41</sup> J. Milgrom, *Numbers: The Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), p. 441.

<sup>42</sup> Josephus suggests that Moses instituted the rite of the red heifer on the death of Miriam (Num 22:1), the ashes of the first sacrifice being used to purify the people at the expiration of thirty days of mourning. See *Jos. Ant.* 4:4, § 6.

<sup>43</sup> Milgrom is of the view that though the antecedent of הוא “it” is technically, “the cow”, חטאת הוא here refers to the ashes containing the ritual detergent, the חטאת-blood. Milgrom, *Numbers 1-20*, p. 158. See also Philip Budd, *Numbers* (WBC; Waco: Word Books, 1984), p. 211. Budd suggests that

especially, such red substances as blood, cedar wood and scarlet suggest any other function of the rite in relation to the object of its application, namely, the corpse-contaminated person? There is the possibility that the ingredients of the ashes-mixture relate to the life of the corpse-contaminated, and this calls for comment.

### (1) Description of the Red Heifer Rite

For the preparation of the ashes for the rite, the Israelites were to provide a heifer, red in colour, without spot, without blemish, and never yoked. This animal was to be given to Eleazar the priest who would bring it outside the camp for it to be slaughtered before him. The priest must then dip his fingers in the blood and sprinkled it seven times in the direction of the tabernacle (Num 19:4); then the carcass of the heifer was to be burned in his presence—skin, flesh, dung and blood.

The priest must take cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet thread,<sup>44</sup> and cast them upon the burning heifer. Another person, ritually clean, must gather up the ashes (אפר) of the burnt heifer and store them in a clean place outside the camp, that they might be used in preparing the “water of separation” (מי נדה).<sup>45</sup> The priest, the man who attended to the burning of the heifer, and the one who gathered the ashes would have to wash themselves and their clothes; they remained ceremonially unclean until sunset. The abode of the dead person would also be unclean for seven days. Even open vessels without coverings would also be unclean.<sup>46</sup> Anyone who touched the dead body, a bone of the dead or a grave would also be unclean for seven days.

For purification, the ashes of the red heifer were dissolved in running water (מים חיים) in a vessel.<sup>47</sup> A clean person then took hyssop, dipped it in the mixture and sprinkled it on the tent, the open vessels and on anyone contaminated by touching

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the author of Numbers aligns the red heifer rite more closely with other sacrificial rituals in the Pentateuch and makes it a sacrifice.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>44</sup> This item “scarlet”, שני תולעת, could also be rendered “crimson fabric”, i.e., red dyed yarn (Lev 14:4, 6, 49, 51, 52 and Num 19:6).

<sup>45</sup> The term מי נדה may be interpreted as “the water of exclusion”, or “water of separation”, i.e., the means for removing the contamination which is the cause of the exclusion.

<sup>46</sup> Spoils of war consisting of metal vessels were to be purified by fire and finally cleansed by the water of purification (Num 31:21-24).

<sup>47</sup> The LXX has ζῶν ὕδωρ, “living water”.



the bone, the dead or the grave. The corpse-contaminated remained unclean for seven days; he was sprinkled with the *מִי נֹדֶה* on the third and on the seventh day, he would be clean again. However, if he did not purify himself on the third day, then on the seventh day he would not be clean. The corpse-contaminated person who did not purify himself defiled the sanctuary of YHWH; and that person must be cut off from Israel: because the *מִי נֹדֶה* has not been sprinkled on him and therefore he remained unclean. Thus, it is the *מִי נֹדֶה* that purified or decontaminated (חטא).

Normally, the corpse contaminant was required to remain outside the camp until he had gone through a period of purification (Num 5:2-3; 3:19).<sup>48</sup> The common suggestion is that the provision of the ritual of the red heifer was a precaution to ensure that the purity of the tabernacle was not violated by impurity of death. However, Levine sees in Num 19, a hidden agenda of the cult of the dead. He observes that the legislation was an attempt to prevent the establishment of the cultic celebration of the dead in Israel, and to uproot such activities where they existed.<sup>49</sup>

## (2) The *מִי נֹדֶה*

The ashes were the ingredients for the preparation of the *מִי נֹדֶה*. The ashes of the red heifer were sprinkled on both the impure object and impure person.<sup>50</sup> The OT gives no textual explanation as to why these three materials, hyssop, cedar-wood and the scarlet wool, were to be burnt as part of the preparation of the ashes of the red heifer in Num 19:5-6.<sup>51</sup> Snaith points out that the *מִי נֹדֶה* is used here in the sense of “de-impurifying”. Levine suggests that in the rite of the red heifer in Num 19, it is the

<sup>48</sup> Unlike the case of the *מִצְרָע* in Lev 14, it is difficult to suggest where the corpse contaminated person is located Num 19 because the passage does not specify isolation outside the camp for corpse-contaminants. Neither is there any provision for their re-entry into the camp after the red heifer ritual. However, it seems the contaminated person was outside the camp since that is where the ashes are prepared and are kept. See further discussion on the ritual purification of the corpse-contaminated, see D.P. Wright, ‘Purification from Corpse-contamination in Numbers XXXI 19-24’, *VT* 35 (1985), pp. 215,

<sup>49</sup> Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 1-20* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1993), p. 472.

<sup>50</sup> J. Milgrom, ‘The Paradox of the Red Cow (Num xix)’, pp. 62-72. Milgrom argues that the *חֵטְאֵת* blood is applied solely to sacred objects within the precincts of the sanctuary and the offerer is never cleansed of his physical impurity by the *חֵטְאֵת* blood but rather by his ablutions.

<sup>51</sup> N. H. Snaith, *Leviticus and Numbers*, (NCB; London: Nelson, 1967), p. 272. Snaith thinks that in accordance with Babylonian sacrifices they would have enhanced the rites with an aroma.

ashes that represent the operative substance and not the blood.<sup>52</sup> According to him, blood symbolizes life, whereas ashes represent death, the ultimate biodegradable condition of the mortal being.<sup>53</sup> However, he does not account for the blood in the ashes, and the fact that the ashes are both the source of both impurity and purity – purity because of the presence of the life in the blood.

Milgrom argues that except for the ashes, the red heifer ritual conforms completely to the Israelite sacrificial system.<sup>54</sup> For Milgrom, the rite of the red heifer is a *חטאת* sacrifice.<sup>55</sup> He thinks the fact that the priest was required to take some blood with his finger and sprinkle it seven times towards the front of the tabernacle of meeting (Num 19:4) points to this rite being a sacrifice. He believes this is a means of consecrating the blood for its use as a purgative in the form of ashes.<sup>56</sup> He suggests that the red elements including the hide of the heifer, the crimson yarn and cedar wood add to the quantity of blood in the ash mixture and enhances its potency.<sup>57</sup> For him, the reddish colour suggests the blood of ritual purification, though he notes that the other red elements of the ashes are secondary to blood in their function as purgatives.<sup>58</sup> He asserts, “it is the blood in the ashes which endows them with purificatory powers.”<sup>59</sup> But Levine is of the view that blood was not functional in the rite of the heifer ashes. For him, blood was operative at an early stage prior to the actual ashes rite, that is, when the blood taken from the slaughtered heifer was sprinkled in the direction of the sanctuary (Num 19:4).<sup>60</sup> He sees this early blood rite as prophylactic, or perhaps apotropaic, with the intent to shield the sanctuary from contamination.<sup>61</sup>

Obviously, the reddish colour of cedar wood, the crimson coloured fabric and the skin colour of the heifer, all seem to have some association with the colour of

<sup>52</sup> Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, p. 471.

<sup>53</sup> Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, p. 471. He adds that “the abject quality of ashes is epitomized in several biblical statements that emphasize human mortality”.

<sup>54</sup> Milgrom, ‘The Paradox of the Red Cow’, pp. 62-72.

<sup>55</sup> Milgrom, ‘The Paradox of the Red Cow’, pp. 62-72.

<sup>56</sup> Milgrom, ‘The Paradox of the Red Cow’, pp. 62-72.

<sup>57</sup> Milgrom, ‘The Paradox of the Red Cow’, pp. 62-72. Milgrom, *Numbers*, p. 158. Milgrom notes that the idea of the red cow is “to increase, if symbolically, the amount of blood in the ashes”. See also Levine, *Numbers*, p. 471. Levine claims that the symbolism of “red” is uncertain.

<sup>58</sup> Milgrom, ‘The Paradox of the Red Cow’, pp. 62-72.

<sup>59</sup> Milgrom, ‘The Paradox of the Red Cow’, pp. 62-72.

<sup>60</sup> Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, p. 472.

<sup>61</sup> Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, p. 472.

blood.<sup>62</sup> However, what is more significant here is the not the colour per se, but rather what is in the symbolism of redness – the symbolism of “life”. Thus, the redness of these ritual substances was, probably, meant to enhance the life-giving property of the ashes. Besides, blood in the ashes does not endow just the ashes with life-giving power, but also the *מי נדה* as a whole.

Another way of understanding the role of the blood of the red heifer rite is to view it in the light of the consequences of neglecting it and the preservation of life. If the corpse-contaminated deliberately neglected the sprinkling of the *מי נדה*, his impurity gathered force to impinge on the sanctuary (Num 19:13, 20). In that case, the penal consequence of his deliberate negligence is *כרת*-penalty (Num 15:30-31), except if he has forgotten (Lev 5:2-3). For the corpse-contaminated, the sprinkling of his body with *מי נדה* could avert the threat of *כרת*-penalty, which may be interpreted as death.<sup>63</sup>

### (3) The Red heifer and Slain-bird rites

The red heifer rite offers an analogy for the blood-sprinkling rite of the slain-bird prescribed for the cured *מצרע*. That this slain-bird of the *מצרע*-ritual was meant to bring life to the one being cleansed is demonstrated by the nature and symbolism of the ritual elements: the blood, red yarn, cedar wood, and water are all symbols of life. In the ritual, each of these ingredients is dipped into the blood of the slaughtered bird (Lev 14:6, 51).<sup>64</sup> The same ingredients constitute the *מי נדה* for the purification of

<sup>62</sup> It must be noted that in the red heifer rite the function of the hyssop is particularly obscure in being part of the ashes (Num 19:6), but it was also used as a sprinkling device in distributing the *מי נדה* on the contaminated person (Num 19:18). The Tannaim suggest that the hyssop and the cedar wood as well, are burned with the red heifer in order to provide sufficient ashes (Sif. Num. 124; Tosef. Para IV 10 and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of Numbers 19:18 (whether the ruling of this last text is Tannaitic is debatable)).

<sup>63</sup> The term *כרת* could be understood as punishment by God in the form of death. See Milgrom, *Cult and Conscience*, p. 75.

<sup>64</sup> Levine, *Sing Unto God A New Song*, p. 66. Levine has observed that the reddened fluid is a kind of intensified blood sprinkled on the one to be cleansed. It functions metonymically to allow him or her to re-experience the discoloration of the scaly skin disease. Rituals involving various red elements often are connected with death, as clearly they occur in the ritual removal of corpse-impurity of *מצרע*-impurity. See also Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality*, p. 145. Maccoby observes that the use of such ritual elements as cedar wood, hyssop and scarlet and the ritual act of sprinkling occur in both rites and in no other cleansing procedure (Lev 14:4-7; Num 19:6, 18).

the corpse-contaminated, suggesting a parallel between the conditions of the corpse-contaminated person and the *מצרע* – each as dead and therefore as impure as the other.

In the rite for the corpse-contaminated, the *חטאת* is slain outside the camp and its blood applied to the body of the person. The blood of the red heifer is not offered up to the altar as it is with the blood of every other *חטאת*.<sup>65</sup> In Lev 14:49-52, the slain-bird rite performed for the purification (*לחטא*) of the leprous house inside the camp is similar to that of the slain-bird rite performed outside the camp (Lev 14:4-7). However, neither the slain nor the living bird is designated as *חטאת* in the *מצרע* ritual outside the camp. For the *מצרע*, a *חטאת*-bird is slaughtered at the sanctuary inside the camp (Lev 14:14:22, 31). Besides, the slain-bird in the purification of the leprous house is a *חטאת*. However, the corpse-contaminated brought no *חטאת* to the sanctuary. This implies that like the red heifer rite, the slain bird can be purificatory in function. Although there are significant similarities between the slain-bird rite outside the camp and the red heifer rite, the latter is different in that it constitutes *חטאת* (Lev 16:5, 8-10; Num 19:9, 17). This implies the former was about something more than just purification of the *מצרע*.

The similarities between the purification rituals of the *מצרע* and the corpse-contaminated lend support to the fact that the condition of the *מצרע* is similar to that of the corpse-contaminated. The *מצרע* was purged by these two prominent symbols of life – the water and the blood – just as a corpse-contaminated person was purged by the *מי נדה*. Milgrom describes the blood as constituting the chief detergent,<sup>66</sup> but we may look beyond that and suggest that purification is only secondary to the rather primary function of blood as the chief life-giving symbol in the *מי נדה*. This same place of prominence given to the *מי נדה* can also be given to the blood/water mixture used in the slain bird rite for the *מצרע*.

<sup>65</sup> Milgrom, 'The Paradox of the Red Cow', pp. 62-72, observes that the blood of the red heifer is not offered on the altar because it is needed in the ashes as a continuing *חטאת*.

<sup>66</sup> Milgrom, 'The Paradox of the Red Cow', pp. 62-72. Milgrom describes blood as a chief detergent because each element must be dipped into the blood (Lev 14:6). The same applies to the leprous house (Lev 14:49-53).

The use of the ashes of the red heifer poses a problem for Milgrom. His question is: why did the Priestly legislators retain the use of the ashes in the *חטאת* purification ritual prescribed for corpse contamination? In response to this question he observes that corpse contamination evoked such an obsessive, irrational fear that it demanded an exorcism, the application of powerful countervailing forces to the body of the contaminated person so as to drive out the dreaded impurity.<sup>67</sup> He argues that the slain bird which had supplied the blood for the *מצרע* ritual was not *חטאת*, and we should not expect it to be, because the blood is not sprinkled in the direction of the Tabernacle as is the blood of the red heifer. He struggles in explaining the sprinkling of the body of corpse-contaminated person with the *חטאת* ashes. He concludes by comparing the slain-bird rite with the red heifer rite, arguing that the sprinkling of the *מצרע* must then represent the more original rite; the red heifer, transformed into a *חטאת*, constitutes a later Israelite usage. His conclusion still raises the problem of whether the dating could not be the other way round, but this is not a subject for our discussion. In providing an alternative explanation for the use of the ashes here, we may suggest two possibilities: either Milgrom's argument that the offerer is never cleansed by the *חטאת* is problematic<sup>68</sup>, or the application of blood to the body means something more than just purification of the person.<sup>69</sup>

While the elements of the ashes, namely blood, red yarn, cedar wood and the red skin of the heifer are all potential symbols of life, specific attention must be drawn to the way in which water is added to the ashes to yield what might be interpreted as distinctively intense symbol of life. That is to say, the dry ashes themselves, a condensed symbol including the dried blood of the heifer, are now made wet through the added water. In other words, the transformation of the dry ashes into the liquid medium by the addition of water expresses the force of life against the force of death. The association of the symbolism of "red" and blood in the ashes with life and the

<sup>67</sup> Milgrom, 'The Paradox of the Red Cow', pp. 62-72.

<sup>68</sup> Milgrom, 'The Paradox of the Red Cow', pp. 62-72; Milgrom, 'Israel's Sanctuary: The Priestly Picture of Dorian Gray', *RB* 83 (1976) 390-399; Milgrom, 'The Function of the *ḥaṭṭā't* sacrifice', *Ta* (1970), pp. 1-8.

<sup>69</sup> Elsewhere, Milgrom claims that it is the blood of a *חטאת*, a purification offering, which is a ritual detergent that removes the impurity from the corpse-contaminated individual. See Milgrom, *Numbers*, p. 159.

symbolism of water as life re-enforces the principle of substitution of life in the rite of the red heifer. I submit, the ashes mixture, with blood as its primary symbol of life, makes the *מי נדה* a liquid of life meant to transmit life to the body of the corpse-contaminated person, whose condition of death, so to speak, was just as invisible as his impurity. Such a view undoubtedly supports an idea of the multi-purpose nature of blood and multi-vocality of blood symbolism in OT rituals.

#### (4) Summary

The rite of the red heifer (*פרה אדמה*) is associated, not only with death, but also with life because it is charged with various symbols of life. It is a rite by which an individual who has become ritually defiled by contact with a corpse is purified by a priest, who sprinkles the contaminated person with a mixture of the burnt ashes of a red heifer and water. Blood, the colour red and water are known from the OT to be an effective means of ritual decontamination as is evident in ancient Israelite ritual of the ashes of the red heifer and the slaughtered-bird rite. Blood is primarily “life” and by virtue of it being life, it can cleanse. The contaminated person was, as it were, “partially dead” and blood is used, presumably, to restore life. It therefore makes sense to suggest that purification and the life-giving role of blood go hand in hand. Whatever may have been the intent in the use of the ashes of the red heifer for cleansing purposes, once blood is involved, the efficacy of the rite is derived from the life-bearing property, hence, the life-giving function of blood rituals.

That in both rites, the liquid mixtures were applied to the subjects’ body, suggests that there was something wrong with the body conditions of both the corpse contaminant and the *מצרע* that ritually moved them outside the camp, away from the presence of YHWH. The blood-like substances in a fluid medium combine in both the slaughtered bird and the red heifer rites to communicate the concept of “giving-life” in these passages on the *מצרע* and the corpse contaminants. The very nature of the red heifer rite itself and its obvious similarity to the slaughtered bird rite in the *מצרע* ritual suggests that the rite was meant to return not only the *מצרע* to life as argued earlier, but also the corpse-contaminated, from a state resembling death to one of life.

#### IV. The מִצְרֵעַ-rite and Blood on the Altar

##### (1) Israelite Sacrificial System

The nature of OT offerings is significant in that it demonstrates the OT notion of sacrifice as involving the manipulation of both flesh and blood. After the animal had died, every trace of its flesh had to be removed by either burning or eating. However the blood remained alive and therefore had to be applied to the altar for life-affirming rituals. An enumeration of all the cases in the OT where blood is employed in sacrifice is unnecessary in this study, as there are so many.

However, it is significant for our discussion in this chapter to note that the slaughtering of the sacrificial animal is a means of ensuring its complete death by exsanguinations, but its blood, retaining its life property, is manipulated in rituals both within and outside the sanctuary. This is why blood was removed entirely from the domain of human consumption. The flesh could wholly be burnt on the altar to YHWH as in the עֹלָה. In the blood rite, the blood could be applied to a person's body,<sup>70</sup> the garments of the priests (Exod 29), places,<sup>71</sup> and sacred objects including the book of the covenant (Exod 24:6-8), the horns of the altar of incense, the horns of the altar of עֹלָה, the sides of the altar of עֹלָה (Lev 5:9), before the veil (Lev 4:6) and the mercy seat. In its application to sacred objects in the sanctuary, blood was distributed by way of sprinkling, pouring around the object or daubing on certain parts like the horns of the altar.

The Court was the location of the altar of burnt offering. Only the priests were allowed to perform rites on the altar. Though lay persons were allowed into the Court, הֶחָצֵר (Exod 27:9-19; Num 4:26, 32), the people could only slaughter their offering on the side of the altar northward before the Lord (Lev 1:11), but they were not permitted to perform their rites on the altar. It was in the Court that the מִצְרֵעַ

<sup>70</sup> The priest and the מִצְרֵעַ-on the tip of the right ear, the right thumb and the big right toe (Lev 8: 23-53; Lev 14:25, 28); upon priests (Exod 29:21); upon the people (Exod 24:6-8).

<sup>71</sup> Upon houses with צִרְעָתָם (Lev 14:51-55), before the tabernacle (Num 19:4), in the Holy Place (Lev 6:3; 16:27)

blood rites of the eighth day took place. It may suffice to mention in general terms what the sacrifices involved in the cleansing of the *מצרע* entailed, and then focus more specifically on the various blood rites at the altar of burnt offering. The cleansing ritual of the healed *מצרע* involved three types of sacrifices: *עלה* (burnt offering), *חטאת* (purification offering), and *אשם* (reparation offering).<sup>72</sup>

## (2) The Blood Rite of the *חטאת*

The conventional meaning of *חטאת* has been “sin offering”.<sup>73</sup> However, according to Barr, the phrase “purification offering” better expresses the purpose of *חטאת* than does “sin offering”, as the previous phrase may make misleading associations.<sup>74</sup> Milgrom has translated *חטאת* “purification offering”.<sup>75</sup> According to Milgrom, the majority of the rabbis held the function of the *חטאת* to be purificatory.<sup>76</sup> He argues that this term is a derivative of a *pi'el* verb “*חטא*” meaning “to cleanse, expurgate, decontaminate” (Lev 8:15; Ezek 43:22, 26).<sup>77</sup> Besides, the *חטאת* is prescribed for persons and objects who cannot possibly have sinned.<sup>78</sup> He observes that the verbs used in connection with the *חטאת* bear the sense of “to cleanse” rather than “to atone for”; hence his proposition that the purpose of the *חטאת* is to cleanse the temple and not to atone for the offerer.<sup>79</sup> Milgrom argues that the ritual of the *ים כפרים* (Lev

<sup>72</sup> *עלה* (Lev 1:1-17, 6:8-13), *חטאת* (Lev 4: 1-5, 13; 6:24-30), and *אשם* (Lev 5:14-6:7; 7:1-10).

<sup>73</sup> K. Koch, ‘*חטא*’, *TDOT* 4.309-317.

<sup>74</sup> J. Barr, ‘Sacrifice and Offering’, *DB* (1963), pp. 868-76.

<sup>75</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New translation and Commentary* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1991), p. 271; J. Milgrom, ‘Sin Offering or Purification Offering?’, *VT* 21 (1971) 237-38.

<sup>76</sup> Milgrom, *Cultic Theology*, p. 68.

<sup>77</sup> Milgrom, *Cultic Theology*, pp. 67-69. Koch, ‘*חטא*’, pp. 309-317 notes that the *piel* means “perform ritual purification”, while the *hithpa'el* forms mean “purify oneself”. See also ‘*חטא*’, *HALOT* 1.305-306, which is from the *piel* with accusative, “to cleanse from sin, purify someone or something: altar, house or temple”.

<sup>78</sup> Milgrom, *Cultic Theology*, pp. 67-69.

<sup>79</sup> For Milgrom’s views on the *חטאת*, see his following works, ‘A Prolegomenon to Leviticus 17:11’, *JBL* 90 (1971), pp. 149-56, and in idem, *Cultic Theology*, pp. 96-103; ‘The Function of the *ḥattā’t* Sacrifice’, *Ta* 40 (1970) 1-8; ‘Two Kinds of *ḥattā’t* Sacrifice’, *VT* 26 (1976), pp. 333-37, and in idem, *Cultic Theology*, pp. 70-74. Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality*, p. 177, sees Milgrom’s argument here as inconclusive for Milgrom’s purpose. Maccoby observes that the verbs meaning “to cleanse” may be used metaphorically to mean, “to cleanse a person’s soul of guilt or sin”, and may therefore have a



16:1-34) should rather be “Day of Cleansing” instead of “Day of Atonement”.<sup>80</sup> The entire sanctuary area is purged on this day with the חטאת-blood.<sup>81</sup>

Janowski argues against Milgrom’s work on חטאת and כפר.<sup>82</sup> He observes that it is insufficient just to say that the fact that חטא means “to cleanse, expurgate, decontaminate” establishes the translation of the חטאת as “purification offering”. For Janowski the verb חטא means “to de-sin”.<sup>83</sup> Koch believes חטאת is performed in order to destroy sin.<sup>84</sup> Concerning the role of blood in dealing with חטאת, he observes that sin infects the sinner and his surroundings as well as the sacred objects. Therefore חטאת blood must atone for the altar and the sanctuary regularly (Exod 3:10; Lev 16:16-20, 33; Ezek 43:19-26).<sup>85</sup> According to Koch, the human owner experiences death vicariously through the חטאת-animal.<sup>86</sup> By this way the sinner is forgiven. The suggestion here is that the חטאת sphere at the sanctuary can be removed through the substitutionary death of the animal.

Milgrom names the מצרע among the physically impure, who are powerful enough to contaminate the sanctuary from afar. The מצרע (like the parturient, the corpse-contaminated Nazirite and the corpse-contaminated priest) must bring the חטאת to the sanctuary in order to purge (כפר) it of its contamination.<sup>87</sup> According to Milgrom, “impurity is an active miasma which is attracted magnet-like to the sacred precincts”.<sup>88</sup> He believes that the postulate underlying the חטאת in the sanctuary is

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meaning very like that of “to atone for”. He adds that, “the possibility remains, especially in relation to the verb כפר, that diverse meanings and usages exist depending on the context”.

<sup>80</sup> Milgrom, *Lev 1-16*, pp. 1009-1084.

<sup>81</sup> Milgrom, *Lev 1-16*, p. 257.

<sup>82</sup> Bernd Janowski, *Sühne als Heilsgeschehen: Studien zur Sühnetheologie der Priesterschrift und zur Wurzel KPR in Alten Orient und im Alten Testament*. WMANT 55 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1982), p. 241 n 287, p. 230 n 226, p. 236 n 251.

<sup>83</sup> Janowski, *Sühne*, p. 241 n 287, p. 230 n 226, p. 236 n 251. Although he agrees with Milgrom in the purificatory function of the חטאת in certain contexts, Janowski argues that Milgrom’s argument that atonement consists in the purification of the sanctuary from ritual uncleanness is incompatible with the notion of a man being guilty.

<sup>84</sup> Koch, ‘חטא’, pp. 309-317.

<sup>85</sup> Koch, ‘חטא’, pp. 309-317.

<sup>86</sup> Koch, ‘חטא’, pp. 309-317.

<sup>87</sup> J. Milgrom, *Cult*, p. 127.

<sup>88</sup> J. Milgrom, *Cult*, p. 127.

that a polluted sanctuary will force God to withdraw his presence from Israel. He argues that the rabbinic tradition has preserved the postulate that the *חטאת* blood is the ritual detergent employed by the priests to purge the sanctuary of the impurities inflicted upon it by the offerer of the sacrifice.<sup>89</sup> The *חטאת* does not cleanse the *מזרע*, who has already been purified. Rather, it purifies the sanctuary.<sup>90</sup> Bringing this offering is the responsibility of the *מזרע* on whose account the sanctuary became unclean. However, Maccoby thinks that is not always true and in the case of the *חטאת*, what matters is the atoning power.<sup>91</sup>

In the Court of the Tabernacle (Lev 4:22-35), the priest took some of the blood of the *חטאת* with his finger, and applied (*נתן*) it on the horns of the altar of *עלה* and then poured some out at its base.<sup>92</sup> In fact, purification of the altar was required before the *עלה* is offered. This may explain why the sacrifice of purification preceded the sacrifice of *עלה*.<sup>93</sup> It is better to render *חטאת* as “purification offering” rather than “sin offering” because it also involves purification from impurity that may have no connection with sin.<sup>94</sup> This is very important for our understanding as we consider the case of the purification of the *מזרע*, where the *חטאת*-blood rite serves to purge or purify the altar on behalf of the offerer rather than to remove sin.<sup>95</sup> Milgrom

<sup>89</sup> J. Milgrom, ‘Israel’s Sanctuary: The Priestly “Picture of Dorian Gray”’, pp. 390–99.

<sup>90</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, pp. 254-58.

<sup>91</sup> Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality*, p. 181.

<sup>92</sup> In the Holy Place (Lev 4:3-21), the blood of the bullock is: (i) applied (*נתן*) to the horns of the incense altar, (ii) sprinkled (*הזה*) seven times before YHWH, in front of the veil of the sanctuary. The *חטאת* ritual may be performed on the behalf of the anointed priest. On the *Yom Kippurim*, the blood of the *חטאת* was brought into the Holy of Holies by the high priest and sprinkled on the *כפרת* (cover of the ark), only once a year (Lev 16:14-15).

<sup>93</sup> See A. F. Rainey, “The Order of Sacrifices in the OT Ritual Texts”, *Bib* 51 (1970), pp. 485-498.

<sup>94</sup> The *piel* form of *חטאת* usually means, “to purify” (Exod 29:36; Lev 8:15; 9:15; 14:49, 52; Num. 19:19). See Jensen, *Graded Holiness*, p. 156. Jensen considers that *כפר* frequently is the purpose of the blood of the *חטאת* needed for purification. See Lev 14:19; 15:30; 16:16. See also Christophe Lemardele, “Le Sacrifice de Purification: Une Sacrifice Ambigu?”, *VT* 52:2 (2002), pp. 284-289.

<sup>95</sup> Jensen, *Graded Holiness*, p. 156, includes in his list of impurities to which no blame can be attached: childbirth, skin disease, discharges and corpse impurity. Others include the installation of a new altar and the Nazirite who completes a vow of abstinence. See Anderson, ‘Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings (OT)’, pp. 879.

has promoted the significant role of the blood of the חטאת in purification.<sup>96</sup> As Milgrom notes, common to impurity bearers is that they must bring the חטאת to the sanctuary in order to כפר it of its contamination.<sup>97</sup> He notes that the חטאת was brought either first, by an individual with severe impurity as that of the parturient or מצרע (Lev 12-15), or second, because certain inadvertent sins have been committed (e.g. Lev 4).<sup>98</sup> Sometimes, the חטאת could be offered outside the altar. Milgrom suggests that the function of the חטאת blood was to purge the sanctuary on behalf of the offerer.<sup>99</sup> He argues that the blood is the purgative element.<sup>100</sup> However, it must be noted, that the חטאת was not needed always for only the cleansing of sin and impurity.<sup>101</sup>

On the Day of Atonement, the blood of the חטאת-goat was daubed on the horns of the outer altar and then sprinkled seven times on the veil (פרכת הקדש). This blood was brought into the Holy of Holies. The rationale for this ritual is found in the text: “cleanse it (the altar) and consecrate it from the impurities of the Israelites” (Lev 16:19). The חטאת-blood effected atonement for the sanctuary to purge it of the impurities of the Israelites and their transgressions, and all their sins (Lev 16:16). The atonement of the Day of Atonement was to cleanse them (אתכם, לטהר, purify you) from their sins thereby rendering them טהר before YHWH (Lev 16:30). It was the atonement that effected the טהר for the people. The חטאת-blood acted as a detergent when sprinkled upon the impure, both purging and consecrating it.

<sup>96</sup> J. Milgrom, ‘Israel’s Sanctuary: The Priestly “Picture of Dorian Gray”’, pp. 390–99. See also, Milgrom, *Cultic Theology*, p. 67.

<sup>97</sup> Milgrom renders כפר here as ‘purge’.

<sup>98</sup> Milgrom, ‘Israel’s Sanctuary: The Priestly “Picture of Dorian Gray”’, pp. 390–99.

<sup>99</sup> Milgrom, ‘Israel’s Sanctuary: The Priestly “Picture of Dorian Gray”’, pp. 390–99. See also Milgrom, *Cult*, p. 127.

<sup>100</sup> J. Milgrom, ‘Two Kinds of *ḥattā’t*’, p. 333–37.

<sup>101</sup> For example, the case of Lev 8:14–17; 9:8; Num 8:8. Jensen, *Graded Holiness*, p. 157, assumes that in such cases where the purification offering is offered without any specific sin or impurity in view, the offering is likely to be part of a comprehensive ritual to ensure that purification is complete or fully assured.

When sacred objects received the blood and became cleansed, the people became cleansed and consecrated to YHWH. In the light of this, I argue that when the blood of the *חטאת* is applied to the sacred object, the impurity of both the sacred object and the *מצרע* are removed.

### (3) The Blood Rite of the *עלה* Offering

The *עלה* is described in Lev 1; 6:1-6 and 7:8. It is the form of offering mostly identified with the court.<sup>102</sup> In the *עלה* ritual, the offerer selected a domestic sacrificial animal, placed his hand on it and slaughtered it at the entrance of the central sanctuary.<sup>103</sup> The *עלה* took place daily in the sanctuary. In sacrifice, both the flesh and the blood were disposed of. The sacrificial rite of *עלה* in the sanctuary involved the disposal of the animal by completely burning its body upon the altar and flinging its blood against the altar all around. The flesh of the dead animal was cut and burned on the altar. In this rite, the animal was wholly burned on the altar of the outer court.<sup>104</sup> No part of it was eaten. The priest then carried the ashes to a clean place. The priest prepared the altar for burning the animal by purifying it with blood by the act of *זרק*, sprinkling.<sup>105</sup> This he did by pouring blood at the base of the altar, purging it of any impurity it might have incurred after the last *עלה*. The purging of the altar prior to the *עלה* is significant because, presumably, the offering had to be presented on a cleansed altar, wiped of all impurity.

Quite significant is the huge amount of blood involved in the *עלה* as compared to the other forms of offering. This can be inferred from the sizes and

<sup>102</sup> It is usually referred to as "burnt offering" in the KJV. Etymologically, *עלה* means "that which ascends". This undoubtedly refers to the rising smoke into which the body of the sacrificial victim is reduced.

<sup>103</sup> The ox was killed before YHWH and the sheep and goat at the north side of the altar of *עלה* (cf Ezek 40:38-42). The poor who could not afford a larger animal might offer a bird. Though it is the offerer presenting the animal who slaughtered it, in the ceremonies of Ezekiel the Levites were given the responsibility of slaying the animals (Ezek 44:11). Where the *עלה* is a bird, the offerer handed a living bird to the priest who carried it to the altar, its neck was wrung, its body cut and burned.

<sup>104</sup> However, the priest may keep the hide of the offering for himself (Lev 7:8).

<sup>105</sup> *זרק* is "to sprinkle" in AV and RV; LXX *προσχω* (see Exod 24:6; 29:16; Lev 1:5, 11; 3:2, 8, 13; 7:2, 14; 1:19, 24; 9:12, 18; 17:6; Num 18:17) 'to pour at' and Latin, *fundere*.

number of animals involved in the sacrifice and the frequency of the ritual. The animal used in *עלה* might be a sheep, a goat, an ox or a bird. When the *עלה* became part of the regular sanctuary rituals it was offered daily, weekly, seasonally and annually.<sup>106</sup> A daily *עלה* was offered every morning and evening.<sup>107</sup> Each Sabbath two lambs were added to the daily *עלה* (Num 28:10).<sup>108</sup> During the major feasts, the *עלה* became larger. Various references specify that the animals and numbers of *עלה* on the feast days each new moon, were two bullocks, one ram and seven lambs (Num 28:1-15). Annually, during the feast of Unleavened Bread (*הג המצות*), two bullocks, one ram, and seven lambs were offered on each of the seven days of the feasts (Num 28:17-25).<sup>109</sup> For the Feast of Weeks (*הג השבועות*), Numbers records two bullocks, one ram and seven lambs (Num 28:26-31).<sup>110</sup> In the month of Tishri alone, larger quantities of blood were offered on the altar than in any other month. At the Feast of Trumpets (1<sup>st</sup> Tishri) one bullock, one ram and seven lambs (Num 29:1-6);<sup>111</sup> on the Day of Atonement, 10<sup>th</sup> Tishri, one bullock, one ram and seven lambs (Num 29:7-11);<sup>112</sup> and finally, during the eight-day Feast of Booths (*הג הסוכות*),<sup>113</sup> 15<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> Tishri, there was a total of one hundred and ninety one *עלה* slaughters, including seventy one bullocks, fifteen rams and 105 lambs.<sup>114</sup>

Also very significant is the fact that blood rite is employed to purify the altar before the burnt offering is made. The reason for the use of the blood is due to its continuing inherent life after it has been shed from the body. After the offering has been consumed with fire, the only evidence of life left of the victim is its blood. Preceding all these *עלות* on the feast days were blood rites on the altar. The sides of

<sup>106</sup> Num 28:3-4; Ezek 46:13.

<sup>107</sup> R. Keith Yerkas, *Sacrifice in Greek and Roman Religions, and Early Judaism* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1953), p. 140.

<sup>108</sup> Yerkas, *Sacrifice in Greek & Roman Religions and Early Judaism*, p. 140.

<sup>109</sup> See also Lev 23:4-8. For further in formation on the *הג המצות*, see Exod 23:15; 34:18; Lev 23:6.

<sup>110</sup> Leviticus gives one bullock, two rams and seven lambs. For further in formation on the first fruits or *הג השבועות* see Exod 23:16; 34:18; Deut 16:16.

<sup>111</sup> See also Lev 23: 24-25.

<sup>112</sup> See also Lev 23:26-32 which records two rams.

<sup>113</sup> For further in formation on the *הג הסוכות* see Exod 34:22; Lev. 23:39.

<sup>114</sup> Day one requires thirteen bullocks, two rams, fourteen lambs; day two to day seven require one less bullock on each succeeding day, but two rams; fourteen lambs each day; day eight one bull, one ram and seven lambs.

the altar must have been literally painted with blood. The blood was for atonement for the altar in the sense that it wiped the impurity off by way of preparing it for the holocaust. It is obvious that the *עֹלָה*, as part of the re-incorporation rite of the *מִצְרַע*, was to cleanse the altar on his behalf.<sup>115</sup>

#### (4) The Role of the Blood on the altar?

The elaborate blood sacrifice at the altar on behalf of the *מִצְרַע* prompts the question: Why should the *מִצְרַע* need this entire blood rite in the sanctuary? If the blood is meant for the removal of impurity from the altar, then it implies the *מִצְרַע* has contributed to defiling the altar. The question becomes how and when the *מִצְרַע* communicated this impurity.

There is not the slightest explanation in the OT references to the ritual of the *מִצְרַע* of what the various blood rites at the altar actually do. However, the application of blood to the altar has to do with atonement. The Hebrew stem *כִּפֶּר* encompasses a range of meanings that includes purging, forgiving, covering and wiping. Milgrom emphasizes the role of purification with regard to the process of atonement by blood, but others, like Janowsky and Gese think differently, viewing the atoning process as one that removes sin.<sup>116</sup> Certainly both arguments may be right, though Milgrom's is an important contribution, more relevant to the discussion of the purification of the *מִצְרַע*.

Anyone experiencing any major impurity belonged outside the camp (Num 5:1-3). Among the severe cases of impurity are those of the *זָב* (semen discharger), *זִבָּה* (female discharger), *נִדָּה*, (menstruant) and *יולדת*, (parturient), *מִצְרַע*, and

<sup>115</sup> For further discussion about the burnt offering, see Philip P. Jensen, 'The Levitical Sacrificial System', in *Sacrifice in the Bible* (ed. R.T. Beckwith and M.J.Selman; Carlisle/Grand Rapids: Paternoster/Baker Book House, 1995), pp. 25-40; G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, (NICOT; Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1979), p. 57. Wenham notes that the idea of the *עֹלָה* offering appeasing God's anger is expressed in many other passages (e.g. Num 15:24; 2 Sam 24:25; Job 1:5; 42:8; 2 Chr 29:7-8).

<sup>116</sup> For their discussion on this, see Janowski, *Sühne als Heilsgeschehen* and Hartmut Gese, *Essays on Biblical Theology* (tr. Keith Crim; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1981).

לִנְפֹשׁ (corpse contaminated).<sup>117</sup> They were to be put outside the camp (מִחֹנֶה) where their impurity could not defile the camp of those in whose midst YHWH dwelt. This is because that which was unclean defiled the sanctuary and thus hindered the worshipper's access to the sanctuary. The restrictions placed on these impurity bearers were not punitive. They were simply precautionary measures taken to ensure that communicable uncleanness was relocated outside the camp and also to discourage such contaminated people from visiting the sanctuary and its precincts. Therefore, they were barred from entering the sanctuary, that is, the locus of pure life.

The instruction to remove the major impurity bearer from within the camp (Num 5:2-3) may imply that the contaminating power of impurity was less outside the camp than inside it. In other words, the farther removed the impurity was from the sanctuary, the less virulent it was for contaminating the sacred objects. Thus, we might rather say that the degree to which the מִצְרֵעַ impurity impinged on the altar got more severe as he got closer to it. This fact could be buttressed by the gradual process in which the מִצְרֵעַ was readmitted into society after he had been healed and was undergoing purification. Having been cured outside the camp, he had to be purified and then enter the camp for a week. After this period of ritual-waiting, he then entered into the sanctuary to offer sacrifice at the altar. He would not normally be required to do this, except in the case that he has contributed either directly or indirectly to defiling the sanctuary and the altar from outside the sanctuary.

The idea of the "lifelessness" of the מִצְרֵעַ broadens to include not only a physical condition imaging the corpse, but also a social separation between 1) the individual's body and the rest of society and 2) the ritually impure person and YHWH

<sup>117</sup> The OT associates uncleanness with dead bodies of humans and animals (Lev 11:25-31). The human corpse is the source of the most severe impurity. Contact with it brought about the most severe contamination. A corpse or carcass contaminated whatever it touched (Lev 11:32). Anyone who touched a dead beast contracted uncleanness (Lev 11:8, 29; 15:24-40). But the defilement that contact with the human corpse brought (Num 19:11-22) was more severe. "He who touches the dead body of anyone shall be unclean seven days" (Num 19:11). A corpse in a tent rendered the whole tent unclean (Num 19:14). Thus the corpse, its bones, and grave were all considered sources of contamination. This justifies the location of the grave outside the camp. Jenson notes in his work the close relation between impurity and death. Jenson, *Graded Holiness*, p. 139. Jewish interpreters considered corpse contamination "the father of fathers of impurity" (אב אבות הטומאה). For further discussion on impurity, see Eli Davis, 'Ritual Purity and Impurity', *EncJud.* 13.1405-1414. See also rabbinic regulations in H. Danby, *The Mishnah: Translated From the Hebrew with Introduction and Brief Explanatory Notes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), pp. 800-804.

in his sanctuary. All who underwent the experience of separation would definitely long for a time when they would be re-incorporated into society, i.e., to repossess the sense of belongingness that death has disturbed. The ritual that re-incorporated the *מצרע* demonstrates how blood contributes in a powerful way to the reconstruction of the social stability and access to the sacred space that “death” has distorted. The significance of social and religious life among the ancient people of Israel was defined by their relationship with God.

A constant ritual in the sanctuary where the people met their God could maintain the stability of this relationship. The sanctuary represented his presence among the children of Israel, and therefore became the very centre of the religious and social life of the Israelites. Since YHWH is holy, his dwelling place must be pure. No unclean thing could be tolerated within the tabernacle and the camp surrounding it. The impure persons were isolated from the camp because their impurity bore serious repercussions for everyday life. A healthy relationship with YHWH seemed to be part of what life meant to the Israelites. This relationship could be disturbed by the sins of the people and their experiences of uncleanness as well. As Yerkes rightly argues, “He who is ‘in sin’ cannot sacrifice; he is a taboo until he is properly purified, usually by blood rite, which removes sin”.<sup>118</sup> The same idea works for the unclean person. His impurity also contaminates the altar and other cultic appurtenances in the sanctuary. The significant rituals of purification take place in the sanctuary and its precincts. This implies that the sanctuary was a place of greater contamination and therefore the place of the greatest absorption of ritual impurity. The objects that underwent purification were designated as “holy”. Thus, the holy sacrificial items of the tabernacle possessed the greatest magnetism with regard to the absorption of impurity.

The unclean person required purification for himself so that he may remain a part of the community (Num 19:13, 20). Moreover, the sacred objects in the sanctuary possessed the capacity to attract impurity.<sup>119</sup> Since a person’s uncleanness defiled the altar, it also needed purification. The fact that the *מצרע* required purification of the altar on the eighth day indicates that he had contributed to the

<sup>118</sup> Yerkes, *Sacrifice in Greek and Roman Religions, and Early Judaism*, p. 134.

<sup>119</sup> We do not however, know about its capacity to repel impurity.



pollution of the altar and therefore was responsible for its cleaning. The *מצרע*'s offering at the sanctuary was the first opportunity granted him, after being cured, to participate in cultic activities. It was a way of ushering him into cultic life. The offering of blood sacrifice at the altar on behalf of the *מצרע* indicated that he was required to contribute towards the purification of the altar in the outer court, which he had contributed in polluting.

I find Milgrom's theory of blood as purgative as an inadequate explanation for the blood ritual at the altar on the eighth day. It does not take into consideration the benefits of the person on whose behalf the offering is being made. In other words, in relation to the content of Lev 17:11, this theory focuses on the means of the ritual (i.e., the aspect of atonement in relation to the altar), and neglects the end of the ritual (i.e., the ultimate purpose being blood application on behalf of the life of the offerer). Blood manipulation in the rites of the cured *מצרע* are basically meant to do something about the life of the *מצרע*.

Blood is life in the physical sense. Therefore, in the context of ritual, it can be applied to the body in an attempt to give life to the body. To say "blood is life" is to say that blood gives life. Without blood, one is dead, but one's blood goes on living on its own outside the body. Blood continues to have power even when it is no longer giving power to the body. This seems to explain why it is employed in rituals that affirm life, as in the case of the *מצרע*. The physical condition of the *מצרע* has to do with the death of the body.<sup>120</sup> The OT provides the blood ritual to convey the *מצרע*, a seemingly deceased person, from the sphere of death into that of the living. Even all other rituals involving blood are performed to relocate the offerer in the presence of God. This chapter shows how blood rites transform the status of this "dead living" into a living person. Thus, in the OT, the blood-rite is about the giving of life and that is what the reincorporating-ritual for the *מצרע* is all about. This is evident in the OT ritual for the re-incorporation of the *מצרע*.

<sup>120</sup> The description of the skin-condition of the *צרעת* in Lev 13 cannot be "leprosy" in the modern sense of the term. This is why I prefer maintaining the term *מצרע* instead of the common term leper.

In the performance of the ritual of restoration for the cured *מצרע* in the OT, two kinds of fluid, blood and water, are the most important. Of these, blood is the life-fluid *par excellence*, not only with regard to the physical preservation of the body but also with regard to ritual transformation from the state of deadness to life. The reason for this is that the *מצרע* is considered dead and alienated, and can be restored only by blood-rites, though water-ritual is also employed at certain points of the ritual.

Life-blood is applied to the altar in order to do something to the altar on behalf of the offerers (Lev. 17:11).<sup>121</sup> The implication here is that the altar of the sanctuary is one of the proper places to which blood belongs – that is, a place that it can promote life. In the ritual context, blood is used to achieve a powerful goal. For example, in the OT sacrificial system, blood purifies when it is used to cleanse the sanctuary. Sometimes, blood ritual requires the sprinkling of blood on the body of the person needing purification as it is in the case of the cured *מצרע* and the corpse-contaminated person. The issue I am exploring in this chapter is the way in which the various blood rites come together to contribute towards the return of the former *מצרע* to full life, as well as both his restoration to the community and participation in cultic activities.

The idea that fluids such as blood and water represent life appears to underlie Israelite rituals that involve such fluids, showing a clear concern to promote and affirm life with these symbols. The Israelites employed blood for all sorts of practical ends, which made blood appear either powerful or dangerous. The thought of blood as powerful comes to the fore in a number of rituals of the OT. This may indicate that all the ideas of blood as purgative, apotropaic, etc., point to one ancient Israelite conception of blood - it lives on outside the body, and so can be employed to keep the offerer of the sacrifice “alive” and the whole religious community ritually “alive”. This “new life” has to do not only with being clean in body and able to participate in the social body that has access to the presence of God in the sanctuary, but also with being physically alive by means of the blood ritual.

<sup>121</sup> The Hebrew text reads *לכפר על-נפשתיכם*, “to make atonement for your lives”.

## V. Conclusion

In the foregoing discussion, I have examined two common ways of looking at the functions of blood on the altar, namely, purificatory and life-giving. However, I must stress that not every blood ritual can be explained the way I have attempted in the case of the cured *מצרע*, as the various blood rites may be doing different things in different contexts. More important has been my attempt to establish correlations between life and the ritual application of blood on the *מצרע*'s "dead living" body, and that of the corpse-contaminated as well.

In this chapter, I have attempted to suggest that in the context of our study, animal sacrifice can also be understood in terms of death (a separation of the blood from the flesh), the consumption of the flesh by fire and/or eating, and the application of the blood to sacred objects on behalf of the offerer. The separation between the Tabernacle and the *מצרע*/corpse-contaminated is one between YHWH (and purity) and impurity, as well as between life and things that have to do with death. Time served to deal with the *מצרע* impurity and "death". This time involved cleansing with blood as well as the giving of life. The blood directly applied to the healed body of the *מצרע* and upon the altar was a restoration ritual to transfer one alienated from the sanctuary by virtue of his or her impurity into the presence of God, a movement from the realms of death to life. The same might have applied to the corpse-contaminated person. Blood ritual changed the dead-like condition of the *מצרע*/corpse-contaminated to that of one who could approach God. The atoning rite at the altar was meant to remove the barrier created by the *מצרע*'s impurity. This is life-enhancing for the *מצרע*. It is in this context that the rites of purification and incorporation of the *מצרע* express the theme of life. This supports the life symbolism of sacrificial blood.

I argue that this discussion has shown that the blood rite performed for the cured *מצרע* was not only a means of purification, consecration and re-incorporation designed for the enablement of the *מצרע*'s approach to YHWH, but primarily, to

return life to the *מצרע* both physically and socially. In different contexts, blood rituals assume different roles. It should be emphasised that there is no evidence in the OT that substantiates a single function and purpose of blood on the altar. However, whatever the correctness of this argument concerning blood-rites, the above explanations open the possibility that the blood, described as being alive, ultimately has a role in establishing life. In the light of the sacrificial context in which the relation of blood to life is given in Lev 17:11, 14, one can understand that the altar rite suggests that blood does not die, even when the flesh does. Blood outside the body is a positive agent, not a waste. Since its life-giving force persists even after it is out of the body, it can be employed to ritually preserve life and effect a change of state, as it were, from death to life.

Maccoby observes that there was a strong incentive to make the *מצרע* similar in his mode of infection to the corpse, because of the similarity between their modes of purification.<sup>122</sup> Following this argument, I propose that there is a strong incentive to make the corpse-contaminated, in his condition of “seemingly dead”, similar to the *מצרע*, because of the similarity between the contents of the rites prescribed for their cleansing, namely, the rite of the red heifer ashes and the slain-bird rite outside the camp.

In this sense, blood whose loss from the body can cause death can also be ritually manipulated to promote life. It is in light of this that I argue that the construction “atonement for your souls” (Lev 17:11), indicates that when the living blood is put on the altar on behalf of *מצרע*, something happens to the altar on his or her behalf. Blood on the altar may be a detergent, as Milgrom proposes. With reference to Lev 17:11, Maccoby explains that sacrificial blood of all sacrifices, including the *חטאת*-offering, has an atoning power because it is the life of the animal that is offered.<sup>123</sup>

In relation to the rite of the *מצרע*, blood may work on the altar as “detergent” as Milgrom proposes of the *חטאת*, or blood may atone for sins rather than always

<sup>122</sup> Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality*, pp. 144 -145.

<sup>123</sup> Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality*, p. 181.

effecting purgation as proposed by Maccoby.<sup>124</sup> Both may be right as far as the altar is concerned. The point is that something that requires removal happens to the sanctuary and the altar as a result of the dead and impure condition of the *מצרע*. However, scholars such as Milgrom, Maccoby and Levine who have discussed the cured *מצרע* have been silent about what the blood actually does to the body in relation to its seemingly dead condition, when it is sprinkled on the cured *מצרע* or daubed on the extremities of his body. It may be obvious that the various blood-rites are for the cleansing of the *מצרע*, but is that the definitive need of the *מצרע*? Obviously, purity and life occur together for the *מצרע* in blood ritual. The fact that issues of purity and impurity may closely tie to issues of life and death indicates that the application of blood to the altar must be understood not only in terms of purity and impurity but also in terms of life and death.<sup>125</sup> The *מצרע* is impure because he is dead. This is what makes restoration to life the primary need of the *מצרע*.

Sacrifice, in the context of blood ritual on the altar, is all about life. Lev 17:11 echoes the fact that the blood is the *נפש* of the flesh, and therefore has been assigned to the altar for the sake of the lives of the people. In other words, the life of the body (i.e., its blood) becomes life on the altar for sacrifice on behalf of the life of the offerer. Ultimately, purgation of the altar with blood is all about the life of the offerer. In my opinion, before any explanation is sought for what blood does on the altar, the first thing that must come to mind must be “life”. Obviously, the blood is not applied to the altar for its own sake but ultimately, for the offerer’s sake.

My suggestion is that the *מצרע*-ritual does two main things; in the context of the altar, it purifies the altar on behalf of the life of the *מצרע*, and in the context of direct application of blood to the body it restores life by ritual transmission of life. Despite this conclusion, I must note that there is still another way of thinking about

<sup>124</sup> Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality*, p. 181.

<sup>125</sup> K. C. Hanson, ‘Blood and Purity in Leviticus and Revelation’, *Journal of Religion and Culture* 28 (1993), pp. 215-230. Hansen sees blood as “a dynamic symbol of life and death which draws the reader’s attention to issues of sacred and profane, purity and pollution, deliverance and judgment”.

the blood on the altar. It is not clear what blood actually does to the altar, though theories of various scholars, especially Milgrom, point to a more general purificatory function. When we look at blood rites at the altar in the light of the fact that Lev 17:10-14 deals with appropriate and inappropriate disposal of blood, one alternative interpretation comes up. That is, when the question is changed from what the blood does to the altar to what the altar does to the blood, the response to the latter could be that, blood retains its נפש after it has been taken from the sacrificial animal and the altar is a safe location where it can be disposed of. Though we do not intend to discuss this in detail, it suffices to note that disposal of blood through eating is considered inappropriate. The other appropriate alternative for the disposal of blood as נפש is burial, a mode also prescribed for the corpse of dead נפש.

In this chapter, we have explored how blood ritual could bring life to the “leper” through the application of blood to his body and also to the altar on his behalf. We have also explored how the corpse-contaminated person is sprinkled with the מי נדה, a fluid charged with the symbolism of life, in order to bring purity and life to his or her body. I also stated the possibility that the red heifer rite was meant to avert danger of כרת, presumably death, which may result from negligence of the rite. Similarly, in order to avert death, the blood of circumcision is applied to Moses’ body (Exod 4:22-26) and also blood is applied to the doorway on behalf of the Israelite first-born (Exod 12:1-28). Thus an exploration of the Passover blood ritual and the circumcision of Moses’ son reinforce my argument in this chapter, that the application of blood, whether directly to a person’s body or indirectly to a sacred object on behalf of the person could bring life to the person. This is the subject of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Blood and Protection: The Passover and Bridegroom of Blood

#### I. Introduction

So far, in the preceding chapters, we have looked at the life-giving role of fluids. My argument in the earlier chapters has been that life, with all its invigorating qualities, inheres in fluids (especially blood) and that the presence of fluids in the body sustains its life. I have also asserted that the ritual manipulation of blood brings life to a person. In Exodus, the Passover and the “bridegroom of blood” narratives give us two key episodes in which blood is connected to the giving of life. This chapter attempts to show that the understanding of blood as life is important in understanding these episodes.

That blood is the life of the body has to do with its life-giving properties in the body. What then about blood outside the body? Of what benefit can it be to a person in relation to his/her life? In the context of the plague of water turning into blood, the blood is presented in a negative light as it presumably brought thirst and threatened to bring death to the Egyptians (Exod 7:19-25). But the object of the Passover blood ritual is positive, not negative. Ultimately, it is to bring life to the Hebrews in general by way of identifying their homes, and specifically, to set them apart and protect their first-born sons and the male firstlings of their animals from physical death through the Passover ritual (Exod 12).

This chapter concerns what the blood rite of the Passover might have meant to the ancient Israelites. I have chosen to discuss the doorway sacrifice in Exod 12 because it clearly shows an Israelite concept of the use of blood to ward off the devastating power of divine action and preserve life. In what sense therefore, can we more convincingly speak of blood as an object for preserving life ritually? This question calls for further discussion in relation to the subject of the role of blood in

preserving or supporting life in the context of OT blood rituals. This certainly forms part of my thesis emphasising the Israelite concept of fluids as essential for the sustenance of life, though our discussion at this point moves us into the sphere of sacrificial rituals. In such rituals, the blood may be tossed against the altar, poured down at its base, put on other sancta in the sanctuary, put on the doorpost or applied to the body of a person.

Of all the ritual use of blood in the OT, none so clearly demonstrates the power of the life-blood to avert the threat of death as the ritual daubing of the doorposts with blood. There is good reason to believe that echoes of the life protective function of blood can be heard within Exod 12:1-20. Here, my interest is in placing a premium on the fact that the blood on the doorway was, more than anything else, a sign of identification indicating that life had been exchanged for life, or death had been substituted for the death of those inside behind the blood-daubed doors. By this line of argument, I am still proposing that blood was used in the OT for life affirming rituals like the sacrifice at the doorway, but I am stepping beyond the common case for the apotropaic view of the Passover Sacrifice, *זבח פסח* as proposed by some scholars.

In attempting to estimate the significance and implications of the conceptions of the preservation of life in relation to the application of blood to the doorway, we may begin with a brief description of the Passover event in Egypt. I must first note that what the portal sacrifice in the Old Testament stood for, whether a blood rite related to purification, an apotropaic act, or a rite of covenant making, is a matter of scholarly debate. We may distinguish two major aspects of the portal blood sacrifice. While writers such as Noth and Gray support the apotropaic notion of the Passover rite, the ancient historians Josephus and Philo saw it as a rite of purification. Clay Trumbull discusses the widespread custom of slaughtering a sacrifice at the door to welcome a guest.<sup>1</sup> Regarding the instructions for the *זבח פסח*, Noth observes that they are chiefly concerned with the apotropaic smearing of the entrances to the houses with the blood of the sacrificial victims, and the prohibition against leaving the houses

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<sup>1</sup> This seems to have been a blood covenant rite by which the guest or stranger became one with the household and its deity. See C. H. Trumbull, *The Threshold Covenant* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1896), pp. 1 ff.



at night in view of the nocturnal destruction taking place outside the houses.<sup>2</sup> Jansen suggests that the doorway was protected by the lamb's blood on the lintel.<sup>3</sup> For him, the Passover was inaugurated for safety and protection.<sup>4</sup> As Gray puts it, "the double Paschal ritual of sprinkling the blood and eating the victim, secured its main end, the security of the house-hold, by a double method: the blood sprinkled without kept evil powers at bay, and the meal eaten within renewed the divine life of the inhabitants."<sup>5</sup> According to Gray:

Using the technical term, we must say that the Passover blood ritual has an *apotropaic* purpose. Since it aimed at keeping some power at a distance, it certainly did not directly aim at communion: whether at any time it definitely aimed at excluding one power by entering into communion with another, whether in virtue of an offering made to that power or because the blood had in it the superior potency of that other power, may be a subject for consideration, but there is in our accounts not the slightest hint of this, and in particular, no hint that the blood was a means to communicate, but merely that this at least in particular had the opposite effect on disunion and isolation.<sup>6</sup>

The association of the blood rite with the invader of the homes indicates that the blood mark was meant for the protection of the Israelites in the context of the plagues and the threat of death. If this is the case, then the Passover sacrifice in Exodus 12 may be interpreted as a protective ritual, but this still raises the question of whether or not the blood functioned primarily as a charm to avert death. The subsequent Passover celebrations presuppose a different religious context, one in which the ceremony becomes a reminder for the later generation of Israelites of the original celebration, with all its accompanying acts of deliverance from Egyptian bondage.

Another possible explanation is to understand the Passover as a rite of purification. Whether the *זבח פסח* can be viewed as such in Exodus 12 is doubtful, in my opinion. Gray believes there is no good ground for believing that the Paschal blood was, while the rite was practised, regarded as expiatory: that, like the blood applied to the temple in Ezekiel's ritual, it was thought to suck out the sin of the

<sup>2</sup> Martin Noth, *Exodus* (London: SCM Press, 1962), p. 97. See Exod 12:21-23.

<sup>3</sup> Gerald Jansen, *Exodus* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), p. 81.

<sup>4</sup> Jansen, *Exodus*, p. 81.

<sup>5</sup> G. B. Gray, *Sacrifice in the Old Testament: Its Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), p. 370.

<sup>6</sup> Gray, *Sacrifice in the Old Testament*, p. 363. Here Gray is using communion theories of sacrifice without explicitly mentioning them.

house.<sup>7</sup> It is interesting, however, to note that Josephus saw the blood in the Passover sacrifice as that which purified their houses.<sup>8</sup> He did not make any direct reference to the significance of the blood in the protection of the Israelite on the night of the Passover. For him, it was meant for purification: “[t]hen when the fourteenth day was come, the whole body, in readiness to start, sacrificed, purified the houses with the blood, using bunches of hyssop to sprinkle it.”<sup>9</sup> Philo described the Passover celebration as the ‘Crossing-festival’. According to him, “to those who are accustomed to turn literal facts into allegory, the Crossing-festival suggests the purification of the soul.”<sup>10</sup>

I do not think the Exodus account presents a purificatory view of the original Passover blood ritual. The notion of purification by blood on the doorway is present in Ezekiel 45. If the interior of the temple can be invaded by impurity, then the blood smeared on the doorway can be a cleansing agent.

There is also the idea that the blood stands as an identification mark. If the blood was looked upon as symbolising life, and God needed to identify his own by marking the doorway of their houses, then blood as a sacrificial element is the appropriate “paint-sign” for this identification and consecration of the houses to himself. It is a sign that would distinguish those “dedicated to the Lord” from those who were not, a sign distinguishing the sons of the Egyptians from the sons of Israel.

That the blood on the doorway of the Israelites homes in Egypt was apotropaic in function is still debatable. If the assertion that it was apotropaic is insufficiently valid, then an investigation of the apotropaic concept and other notions in the OT regarding what was the meaning and function of the Passover blood-mark clearly becomes of the utmost importance in conjecturing the most convincing ritual role of blood in the sustenance of life.

<sup>7</sup> Gray, *Sacrifice in the Old Testament*, p. 363.

<sup>8</sup> Josephus also notes in his Passover account of Egypt: “they offered the sacrifice and purified their houses with the blood, using bunches of hyssop for that purpose” (*Ant.* 2.14.6 § 312). See *Flavius Josephus: Complete Works*, (tr. William Whiston; Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1962), p. 62.

<sup>9</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* II. 6, *Books I-IV*, (tr. H. St. J. Thackeray; LCL; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1978), p. 300.

<sup>10</sup> Philo, *The Special Laws*, II. 45 (147). See F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, eds., *The Works of Philo* (LCL; Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press / London: William Heinemann, 1929-1953), vols. 1-10.

The blood rite of the Passover and a rite of consecration of Israel's first-born sons and male animals also must be discussed. This is because, though the Passover blood rite was meant generally for the deliverance of the Hebrew nation, it was designed specifically for the preservation of the Israelite firstlings, allowing for the destruction of only the Egyptian firstlings. Most scholars appear not to give attention to the discussion of the blood sign on the Hebrew homes with regard to the fact that it might have had many functions, doing and meaning something different to YHWH and the Destroyer, to the first-born males and to the whole nation of Israel.<sup>11</sup>

The objective of this investigation is to contribute to the understanding of the place of blood-ritual in deliverance from danger and death in the context of Exodus 12. The most distinctive feature of the Egyptian Passover sacrifice was the blood on the doorposts and lintels. Our focus of study, therefore, will be on the examination of the content of Exod 12:1-28 in order to find out first, whether there is a sense in which it can be argued that the *חַמָּץ* blood had some apotropaic, cleansing and consecrational value. Second, we shall attempt to propose a response to the highly debatable question of whether the blood did possess in itself some properties that made it potent to avert the danger of death upon seeing it, or whether it was just a sign (*אֵימָנָה*) identifying the Israelites who belonged to Yahweh, from the Egyptians. I will not explore the sources of blood in general and the fundamental quality of blood prescribed for the portal sacrifices at the Egyptian Passover, though that subject is also significant. Reference will also be made to the temple portal sacrifice by the time of Ezekiel (Ezek 45:18-20) as a *חַמָּץ*-ritual or portal ritual which seems to lend support to the idea of the *חַמָּץ* blood played a cleansing role in the sacrifice.

Before we proceed, I propose to consider a brief description of the Passover event and make a few suggestions regarding the origin of the Passover and a few parallel customs in other cultures. Then in order to better understand the Passover as a "portal sacrifice", we will need to identify what makes up the doorway.

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<sup>11</sup> Whatever the blood rite might have done to their home in terms of purification is not significant here as it might have been done on behalf of the people who were about to leave those houses forever.

## II. The Passover Blood Ritual

### (1) An Overview of the Passover

In the story of the ten plagues we see climatic and ecological disasters, and finally the dramatic impact of the death of the first-born, having their desired effect on the Pharaoh and Egypt. With careful reading, the impression cannot be ignored that the focus of interest in the פסח account is not so much on some annual festivals and their accompanying rituals as on the important theme of YHWH's deliverance of a chosen people from a sphere of bondage — a people to whom He identifies Himself as their God.

As regards the meaning of פסח, there are three traditions about what the stem פסח means. These are “to have compassion,”<sup>12</sup> “to protect,”<sup>13</sup> and “to skip over.”<sup>14</sup> Though the interpretation “to skip over” seems to have gained the widest currency,<sup>15</sup> it is believed to be the least likely meaning of פסח, because the term was originally independent of the Exodus event.<sup>16</sup> The verbal form of the פסח is that which means “to limp”, and points to YHWH skipping the houses of the Israelites which had the sign of blood on their doors (Exod 12:13, 23, 27).<sup>17</sup> Because of this meaning, some have associated the origin of the festival with a “limping dance.”<sup>18</sup> Trumbull wrongly stresses that the word “Passover” means a “leaping over” the threshold, after it has been sanctified with the blood of the threshold covenant. In Isaiah 31:5, the verb has

<sup>12</sup>Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus* (JPS Torah Commentary; Jerusalem: The Jewish Publications Society, 1991), p. 56.

<sup>13</sup> cf. with Isa. 31:5.

<sup>14</sup> *Jub.* 49:2-4. cf. 1 Kgs. 18:26.

<sup>15</sup> Sarna, *Exodus*, p. 56.

<sup>16</sup> Sarna, *Exodus*, p. 56.

<sup>17</sup> See also 2 Sam 4:4; 1 Kgs 18:21, 26. Several other meanings have been proposed for פסח, some of which are derivations from Egyptian, Akkadian and Arabic. There is a sense in which the noun פסח refers to the animal to be killed for the ritual (Exod 12:21). The noun may also be used of the festival (Deut 16:1). See Childs, *Exodus*, p. 183.

<sup>18</sup> R. Alan Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1973), p. 108. Cole argues that whatever the interpretations that may be given, the פסח to the Israelites meant a passing over or a leaping over, and was applied to God's act in history on the occasion of sparing his people, Israel.

the connotation “to protect.”<sup>19</sup> The “Passover thus expresses the meaning and the object of the ordinance.”<sup>20</sup>

The history of the Hebrew Patriarchs leads towards the first Passover in Egypt.<sup>21</sup> A little over four centuries had gone by since the descendants of Jacob came to live in the Land of Egypt (Exod 12:40). God had promised their fathers that He would take them back to the land of Canaan (Gen 46:3-4; 50:24). The time had now come for God to fulfil His promise. Exod 11 is God’s address to Moses, concerning the tenth plague about to come upon the Egyptians and their gods. The Lord would pass through the land and smite all the firstborn of their families and their animals. God’s deliverance on behalf of Israel was going to come with this final plague.<sup>22</sup>

The account in Exod 12 clearly takes note of the important details of the first Hebrew Passover rite. The instruction on the preparation of the Passover was clear. The whole community of Hebrews, the congregation of Israel, was to partake of the Passover rite. The month of the Exodus was to be regarded as the first month of Hebrew calendar. This was to mark a new beginning for the people of Israel. On the 10<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan, a lamb or kid was to be selected by the individual families and be kept until 14 Nisan when it would be slaughtered (Exod 12:6). The animal was required to be a one year old male, without blemish; the doorposts and the lintel of the house were to be daubed with its blood; the animal victim was slaughtered “between the evenings” of 14 Nisan and 15 Nisan. Families too small for a whole lamb were to unite with other families. Here, the size of the family may not be computed only in terms of size but also the consumption capacities of the individual members, which could also be considered in terms of age (Exod 12:4); the whole body was to be roasted intact in fire with the head, feet and entrails;<sup>23</sup> it then was eaten with

<sup>19</sup> B. S. Childs, *Exodus: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1974), p. 183. In Isa 3:5, the verb פָּסַח occurs as “passing over” with connotations of “preservation.”

<sup>20</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *The Exodus and the Wandering in the Wilderness* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1876), p. 79.

<sup>21</sup> Prosic, Tamara, ‘Origin of the Passover’, *SJOT* 13 (1999) 78-94. Prosic makes mention of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob but leaves out Joseph who is significant in the whole play of Israelite life in Egypt.

<sup>22</sup> Scholars continue to be at odds with one another regarding how the account of the Passover ritual relates to the plague tradition. Childs notes that the task of determining the exact relationship between these two traditions is difficult and involves a complex development within the history of traditions. See Childs, *Exodus*, p. 191.

<sup>23</sup> The victim’s body was not to be eaten raw. Exodus (P) originally later prescribed the eating of a פָּסַח victim prepared by צָלָה, that is roasting (Exod 12:8) and proscribes the preparation of the victim

unleavened bread and bitter herbs; its bones were not to be broken; it was to be eaten on the night of the Passover and nothing should be left over until the morning, and all leftovers were to be burnt (Exod 12:10). The Israelites were also to eat it with their loins girded, their sandals on their feet, staff in hand and eating done in haste.

For the Israelites, the Passover night was an event of deliverance, while it was one of destruction and death for the Egyptians. In the night, YHWH delivered not only the firstborn of the Israelites, but more significantly, the deliverance of the whole national body of Israel as His firstborn.<sup>24</sup> It was a night of liberation in which YHWH shattered the pride of Egypt by slaying the eldest son in every Egyptian household from the firstborn son of the Pharaoh on the throne, to the first born son of the prisoner in the dungeon. Not a single family in all Egypt escaped this tenth awful plague. All, except those who had smeared the blood of the Passover lamb on their doorposts and lintels, were visited with death. The Passover was the day on which YHWH delivered His people from Egypt (Exod 12:6; Lev 23:5; Num 9:3; 28:16).<sup>25</sup> The Israelites were to keep the day of the Egyptian Passover as a memorial, a feast to YHWH throughout their generations (Exod 12:14, 24-27). Whatever the primary significance of the Passover sacrifice was, the texts make clear that its annual repetition had a purely commemorative function, recalling to later generations the wondrous benefactions of God to Israel.<sup>26</sup> It aimed to arouse in later times the sentiments of gratitude and loyalty to God.<sup>27</sup>

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by בָּשָׁל, that is, cooked, boiling or sodden in water (Exod 12:9). However, on the contrary, Deuteronomy (D) later prescribed the eating of a פֶּסַח victim prepared by בָּשָׁל (Deut 16:6-7). The opinion has been upheld by R. de Vaux that this mode of preparing the Passover victim derives from the practice of nomad shepherds who do not encumber themselves with cooking utensils and only needed a fire to roast their meat, see R. de Vaux, *Studies in Old Testament Sacrifice* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1964), p. 8. The Mishnah, in Pes. 7:1ff directs that it shall be roasted. Thus the Jews have preserved the practice of roasting the victim. It must be noted that it was only a portion of the blood of the victim that was used in the ritual in the sanctuary. In certain sacrifices, the rest of the blood left in the flesh may be consumed by fire and never eaten. In the פֶּסַח sacrifice where the flesh must be wholly eaten, the people were obliged to roast.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Exod 4:22.

<sup>25</sup> This month was the equivalent of our March-April. In commemoration of this miraculous and awesome deliverance, the month of Nisan (Exod 13:4; 34:18), became the first month of the Hebrew religious year from the time of the Egyptian Passover forward (Exod 12:2; Num 9:5; 28:16).

<sup>26</sup> Moshe Greenberg, *Studies in the Bible and Jewish Thought* (Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1995), p. 86.

<sup>27</sup> Greenberg, *Studies in the Bible and Jewish Thought*, p. 86.

In the Passover account, the blood is the core symbol for the Passover rite (Exod 12; 34:25; Deut 16:1-7). Blood sacrifice is the core of the event. Without the blood there would have been no deliverance. What then was its function on the doorway? The  $\Pi\Omega\Phi$  blood was a sacrificial ritual in which YHWH spared the blood-marked houses in Egypt (Exod 12:13, 23, 27).<sup>28</sup> Some scholars have interpreted the first Israelite Passover as a survival of and presumably, a distortion of more ancient agricultural sacrifices. It has been observed generally that the Passover was originally a pre-Mosaic spring offering of propitiation and communion with the deity.<sup>29</sup> This was offered annually in order to protect tents and flocks from pestilence or other misfortune during the coming year, and to renew by the common sacred meal a sense of communion with the deity.<sup>30</sup> The observance, however, came to be associated with Israel's deliverance from the plagues, which attacked the people of Egypt.<sup>31</sup>

R. de Vaux indicates that all these rites correspond to the custom of a nomadic life.<sup>32</sup> However, our discussion here does not attempt a detailed account of the historical origins and development of the Passover, neither will we discuss its association with the feast of unleavened bread.<sup>33</sup>

Some more recent scholars, like Engnell and Segal, have sought closer parallels in Ancient Near Eastern materials. Engnell has suggested that the Passover festival reflects the pattern of a Canaanite New Year's festival in the spring.<sup>34</sup> Segal also impresses us with the notion that rites such as blood manipulation, selection of

<sup>28</sup> Though it is a ritual in which the animal victim is sacrificed (Exod 12:21), the original  $\Pi\Omega\Phi$  did not require an altar or a priest. Thus, it was originally domestic rather than a sanctuary ritual, especially at a time when the Israelite national sanctuary had not yet been established.

<sup>29</sup> S. R. Driver, *The Book of Exodus: The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), p. 93.

<sup>30</sup> Driver, *The Book of Exodus*, p. 93.

<sup>31</sup> Driver, *The Book of Exodus*, p. 93.

<sup>32</sup> de Vaux, *Studies in Old Testament Sacrifice*, pp. 3, 4. According to him, the Passover was a sacrifice of nomads and semi-nomads. Some see it as a spring festival. For further information on the rituals of the spring festival, see N. H. Snaith, *The Jewish New Year Festival: Its Origins and Development*, 1947, pp. 13ff; G. B. Gray, "Passover and Unleavened Bread: the Law of J, E, and D," in *JTS* 37 (1936), pp. 241ff. For A. Vincent, the Passover was a Spring festival, an agricultural festival. He sees the Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread as combined, as early as the time of the Exodus event. See also I. Engnell, 'Paesaḥ-maṣṣôt and the Problem of "Patternism"' in *Orientalia Suecana* I (1952), pp. 39-50.

<sup>33</sup> Some scholars see the Passover as an agricultural festival celebrated among the ancient Near Eastern peoples. Hooke compares the Passover with the *akitu* of the Babylonians. See S. H. Hooke, *The Origins of the Early Semitic Ritual* (1938), pp. 48-50.

<sup>34</sup> Childs, *Exodus*, p. 188.

sacrificial animals, etc., have emerged from a common Near Eastern background.<sup>35</sup> It has generally been accepted by many scholars that the Israelite Passover in Egypt, in its essentials, does not seem to have come from an old pre-Mosaic, Semitic apotropaic ritual.<sup>36</sup> R. de Vaux clearly stresses that “the rite is unknown in Mesopotamia and Egypt.”<sup>37</sup> It is apparent that the ancient Near East offers no help in understanding the rite.

It would be controversial to conclude categorically that the Passover blood rite was intended to take the place of some analogous pre-Exodus custom. As long as the tensions regarding the origin of the rite exist, we must be cautious in concluding that Israel adopted the Passover ritual from some pre-Israelite cultic practices for her own situation. There is no clear historical evidence as yet supporting the stages of development of the Passover tradition from other parallel ancient cultic rites.

## (2) The Sacredness of the Doorframe

The sacredness of the doorframe as a place and object daubed with דם blood for the purposes of preserving life is most clearly demonstrated in the פסח event. The instruction of this portal sacrifice involved the application of blood on every side of the doorframe:

And take a bunch of hyssop, and dip *it* in the blood that *is* in the basin, and daub the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that *is* in the basin; and none of you should go out of the doorway of his house until the morning (Exod 12:22).

The doorway comprises the doorframe and the opening enclosed by the doorframe. This opening can be closed with a door or a curtain in order to prevent unwarranted or free entry or exit. In some cases, in order to prevent destruction and disorder within the house, a guard is posted at the door to control the crossing of the doorway by any external invader.<sup>38</sup> Many cultures of the world have developed the notion that evil

<sup>35</sup> Childs, *Exodus*, p. 188.

<sup>36</sup> However MacCulloch suggests that the Passover rite goes back to a sacrifice by which the household divinity dwelling at the doorway was propitiated and his protective power secured against the destroyer. See J. A. MacCulloch, “Door,” *ERE* 4.846-852.

<sup>37</sup> R. de Vaux, *Studies in the Old Testament*, p. 18.

<sup>38</sup> In early Israelite times, the threshold, especially of the temple, possessed a special sanctity. There were special guards of the threshold. We may note also that there were among the priests in the Jerusalem temple, שומר הַסֵּף “the guard of the threshold” (Jer 35:4). This was a high ranking official.



and threat of death in various manifestations can invade the doorway of the home to cause destruction within if the door is not guarded. This is justification underlying the placing of apotropaic objects such as images, inscriptions, signs, metal and wooden ornaments, charms of various forms, talisman, and such like at the door.

Much has been documented on the daubing on the doorway with blood as practiced in many cultures from antiquity up to the present. Underlying this practice is the perception of blood as life in these cultures, hence its inherent vital power to protect life. Did the Israelites also have such a belief? The original Passover account in Exodus documents a classic example of the Israelite practice of the portal blood-rite designed to protect lives. Van Gennep notes that rites pertaining to the threshold and other such rites “should be understood as direct and physical rites of entrance, of waiting and of departure—that is, as rites of passage.”<sup>39</sup> However, the OT is silent on any such purpose for portal sacrifice. There are also a few parallels to this notion in the OT.

In the OT, the doorframe is sometimes associated with religious rites. The most distinguishing feature of the Egyptian *פסח זבח* (Passover sacrifice) was the blood on the doorposts and lintels.<sup>40</sup> The lintel and doorposts became the demarcation between the sacred Israelite interior and the profane world outside.<sup>41</sup> Some may describe the sacrificial rituals at the entrance of the house in Exodus 12 as a threshold rite, but I propose to call it “portal rite” because the quality of the sacredness of the doorway, particularly the doorframe in the context of the text, encompasses not only the threshold, but also, the lintel and the side-posts as well.<sup>42</sup>

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But later on in the history of Israelite Temple worship, there were appointed several *שערים בספים* gatekeepers at the thresholds (I Chr 9:22); *שערי הספים* gatekeepers of the thresholds (2 Chr 23:4).

<sup>39</sup> Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, p. 25.

<sup>40</sup> In Exod 12:27, the term sacrifice is used of the Passover.

<sup>41</sup> Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, p. 55. This idea is not true only for Israel. Discussing rituals pertaining to the door, such as marriage, adoption, ordination, and funeral ceremonies, van Gennep points out that, “the door is a boundary between the foreign and the domestic worlds in the case of an ordinary dwelling, between the profane and the sacred worlds in the case of a temple”. See van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, p. 20.

<sup>42</sup> See McCulloch “Door”, pp. 846-852. With reference to Exod 12:22. McCulloch thinks that the blood smeared on the doorposts and lintels was perhaps first poured on the threshold.

The word **סף** refers to the threshold,<sup>43</sup> a part of the doorway or gate, specifically, the bottom horizontal component of the doorframe.<sup>44</sup> In some cases **סף** is translated “basin” or “cup”.<sup>45</sup> However, the description of the doorway will not be complete if **סף**, which must obviously be part of the door, is rendered “basin”. The components of the doorframe are; the **משקוף** (lintel), which is the beam above the door, the **מזוזה** with the two vertical components,<sup>46</sup> and the **סף**.<sup>47</sup> It is obvious that, in the Egyptian Passover event, each side of the doorway, horizontal and vertical, was daubed with blood.

The Passover **פסח** was a doorway, or portal, blood ritual. The **פסח** suggests an Israelite perception of the parts of the doorframe as invested with a special sanctity. If this is true, then what was the significance of the **מזבח** in that context? In the **פסח** the placement of the blood on the doorway made the doorposts, the lintel and the threshold parallel in function to the sacrificial altar, **מזבח**,<sup>48</sup> an object of **זבח**.<sup>49</sup> Presumably, at the Passover, the blood that was poured out in **זבח** at the **סף** (threshold) was used in marking the doorpost and lintel for various functions. These

<sup>43</sup> The LXX translates **סף** as **θύρα**, “threshold”. Alan Cole thinks that since there is no reference to the slaughtering of the lamb at the threshold, it would not make good sense to translate **סף** as ‘threshold.’ See Cole, *Exodus*, p. 110.

<sup>44</sup> See Carol Meyer, “Threshold,” *ABD* 6.544-545.

<sup>45</sup> The Syriac supports ‘basin’ as the equivalent of **סף**. The word **סף**, *sap* has been rendered ‘basin’ in most of the English translations of this text. The term must imply some sort of depression (basin) in the earth at the threshold of the entrance into the house, although we may not be able to grasp the exact nature of it. For contrary views, see Trumbull holds a similar view; see Trumbull, *The Threshold Covenant*, 207. The LXX in the story of the Passover in Egypt renders **סף** by **θύρα** (Exod 12:22), meaning “doorway,” “gate,” “a portal” or “entrance.” The Assyrian equivalent of the Hebrew **סף** is *sippu* which basically means threshold. Another misleading English translation is found in Zech. 12:1-3 where the passage speaks about people and boundaries. Here **סף** is rendered “cup” instead of “threshold.”

<sup>46</sup> Sing. **מזוזה** “side-post,” “doorpost or jamb.”

<sup>47</sup> The Hebrew term **סף** is rendered “door” in the KJV. In the RSV, it is “threshold”, except in 2 Chr. 23:4 where it becomes “gate.”

<sup>48</sup> See Trumbull, *The Threshold Covenant*, p. 3. Trumbull is of the view that “the primitive altar of the family would seem to have been, the threshold, or door-sill, or entrance-way of the home dwelling place.” He regards the threshold as having been a primitive altar—originally of a house, then of a temple. However, it is difficult to find evidence for Trumbull’s assertion.

<sup>49</sup> To say blood on the doorway is purificatory means blood on the **מזוזה** absorbs impurity just as it does on the altar, thereby equating the role of the **מזוזה** with that of the altar in this particular sacrificial context.

included for example the dedication of the Hebrew firstborn males to YHWH, the apotropaic ritual of warding away evil and death, and further, a purification ritual. The question is, what function does the blood rite perform at the Egyptian Passover? We will turn to each of these possible functions of the blood rite of the Passover in the following discussion. But before then, we will explore whether the Passover blood ritual was also meant for the consecration of the first-born or not.

### (3) The Blood and the Firstborn?

There is a connection between the Passover and the consecration of the first-born among the Hebrews. The Passover, presumably, symbolised for the Hebrews a consecration of the first-born sons and the firstlings of their animals to YHWH.<sup>50</sup> YHWH decimated the Egyptians' first-born and spared the Hebrews' for himself. The Passover was a ritual of consecration of the first-born, literally, the "womb-opener". These were first-born males of the Israelites and their animals. Exod 13:1-16 introduces this issue of setting the first born apart to YHWH, thereby supporting the theme of the "first-born" as the central issue in the Passover evening. The idea of consecration could mean sacrifice.<sup>51</sup>

The passages in Exod 13:1-16; 22:29 describe the consecration of a first-born male child.<sup>52</sup> The law in Exod 13:11-16 provides an explanation for the command; "consecrate to me every first-born, whatsoever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of human and of animal: it is mine." This was a law to be kept by the Israelites when they had entered Canaan to reside in it (Exod 13:11). The expression *והעברת* (and you shall set apart) in Exod 13:12 comes from the verb *עבר* meaning, "to pass over." Currid, seeing a word-play here, notes that as YHWH passed over the Hebrews during the tenth plague, the Hebrews are now to pass over their first-born to him.<sup>53</sup> Explaining the instruction about setting apart the first-born to YHWH in Exod

<sup>50</sup> The preferential privileges of the eldest son were well known in Babylonia, Assyria, Syria and Palestine. See R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (London: Darton, Longman Todd, 1965), pp. 443-444; I. Mendelsohn, 'On the Preferential Status of the Eldest Son', *BASOR*, 156 (1959), pp. 38-40.

<sup>51</sup> Cole, *Exodus*, p. 114.

<sup>52</sup> See also Exod 22:29-30; 34:19-20; Num 3:12; 18:16.

<sup>53</sup> J. D. Currid, *Exodus* vol. 1 (Auburn: Evangelical Press, 2000), p. 275.

13:2, Sarna observes that the expression “consecrate to me” usually involves both a purificatory rite and an induction ceremony.<sup>54</sup>

Purification rites normally require the initiate’s bathing, laundering of clothes, or abstention from ritual defilement.<sup>55</sup> It is difficult to pinpoint any reference in the Passover rite that suggests that the first-born sons underwent ritual requirements with water. However, the blood of the Passover victim might have performed the purification on behalf of the first-born sons. As to whether the first born male domestic animals of the Hebrews also needed such purification, I consider it an irrelevant matter that belongs to speculation, though those who may argue against the idea of the Passover blood rite being purificatory may press for a response to this question.

Exod 13:15 provides the formal answer which a father in ancient Israel was expected to give to his sons when they asked the meaning of the rituals related to firstborns (Exod 13:14): “For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord slew all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both the first-born of man and the first-born of cattle. Therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all the males that first open the womb; but all the first-born of my sons I redeem.”

The Passover victims died to redeem the Israelite firstborn. However, as Sarna rightly observes, the mode of redemption of the first-born male is not given.<sup>56</sup> The Egyptian first-borns did not have any sacrificial animals dying on their behalf. Presumably, the purpose of the Passover blood rite was, 1) to “sacrifice to the Lord all males that first open the womb,” redeeming every Hebrew first-born son from death, and 2) to mark the birth of YHWH’s son, the new independent Hebrew nation delivered to serve YHWH. Earlier on before the Passover, YHWH had instructed Moses: “And you must say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord, Israel is my first-born son, and I say to you, “Let my son go that he may serve me”; and if you refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay your first-born son’”(Exod 4:22, 23). The Passover was a rite relating to the first-born; a blood rite involving redemption, an action that saved the life of the Hebrew first-born. The Passover blood ritual was presumably a

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<sup>54</sup> Sarna, *Exodus*, p. 65.

<sup>55</sup> Sarna, *Exodus*, p. 65.

<sup>56</sup> Sarna, *Exodus*, p. 67.

consecration rite. The consecration of the Hebrew first born males was the fundamental rationale for the blood rite of the Egyptian Passover that saw the death of the Egyptian first-born. The meaning of the Passover was the redemption of the first-born, the substitution of the life of the Hebrew first born male with the blood of the Passover animal. Thus it will still be a matter of speculation that the Passover blood rite was for the consecration of the first-born male to YHWH.

The threshold blood-ritual also solemnises the experience at the time of the Passover. Thus, the threshold experience of this ritual provides a context for delivering both the firstborn and the whole Hebrew community. The rituals we have examined can be represented in the ritual pattern identified by Van Gennep: separation, liminality, and reincorporation.

In the Passover narrative, the condition of the Israelites is liminal. At the Passover, the whole Hebrew community stood on the threshold between its old experience under oppression from Egypt and its new age of freedom in a new and Promised Land. They were in Egyptian bondage. Their first fruits or firstborns were on the threshold between the threat of death and life. Standing between these two realities, the firstborns could be perceived as being essentially dead, yet furnished with the potential to live, a potential that could be realised in a ritual substitution of life through a portal blood-sacrifice. In one moment the Israelites were in Egypt, but the Israel-son-nation had the potential to be initiated into a new life in a new land, to be reborn in a new land,<sup>57</sup> as suggested by the son and firstborn images in the Passover narratives.

The Passover was a moment when the God of Israel had appointed for them at the doorway, comprising the doorposts, the lintel and the threshold, a sacred locus, as it were, at which to enact the blood ritual that was not to expiate their guilt or purge their impurity, but rather bring them life by way of warding off the power of death so that they and their firstborns may be joyfully drawn, as a "whole nation," into freedom in another land. Israel's crossing of the threshold in time was one of joy while the Egyptians mourned the death of the firstborns. In the Passover rite, physical lives have been preserved in the blood-daubed homes, an experience of the individual

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<sup>57</sup> Léviné, *Sing unto God a New Song*, p. 78. Levine has similar views regarding the condition of exile being liminal.

Israelite which microcosms the deliverance of the Israelite social body from oppression. Both the individual and social deliverance were made possible by the same life-giving blood-rite.

In Egypt, Israel was like a weed, a plant out of place, and therefore suffered oppression, misery, mourning and other similar images of death. The Passover moment became one of envisioning the bright future, marked by a rite of passage from hopelessness to hope, and from death to life. Blood-rite was a vehicle of life for the firstborn standing on the critical threshold of life.

### III. The Blood-Sign as a Protective

#### (1) Was the Passover Blood Protective?

The statement in Exod 12:23 is very significant, as it portrays YHWH as the guardian who prevents the *מִשְׁחִית* from entering to destroy and not the blood itself. But the blood-mark distinguished between which households YHWH must guard and which ones He must allow the *מִשְׁחִית* to plague with death.

When slaughtered, the blood of the victim was to be smeared on the doorposts and lintels of the houses in which they would be eating (Exod 12:7).<sup>58</sup> The blood was to be a visible sign to both YHWH and Israel. Blood was a readily available colouring substance; it also possessed symbolic significance because it was looked upon as the very essence of life.<sup>59</sup> The term *אוֹת* basically means “sign”, which in this context, refers to a distinguishing mark. In the theological sense, Gunkel suggests that *אוֹת* is “an object, an occurrence, an event through which a person is to recognise, learn, remember, or perceive the credibility of something”.<sup>60</sup> By this definition, what is crucial in a sign is not the sign itself or its execution, but its function and its

<sup>58</sup>Passover in so far as it refers to blood smearing of door-post can also be seen in Ezek 45:18-25. In Ezekiel the purpose of this application of blood is clear: it is to draw out of the sanctuary the sin which has soaked into it during the past year, or rather the past six months, for the ceremony was repeated on the first day of the seventh month. See Gray, *Sacrifice in the Old Testament*, p. 359. In Ezek. 45:18, the aim of the ritual was to rid what was naturally holy from intrusive contamination. In Ezekiel and Leviticus, the blood is a disinfectant.

<sup>59</sup> Gen. 9:4; Lev. 17:11, 12; Deut. 12:23; cf. Ps. 72:14.

<sup>60</sup> F. J. Helfmeyer, “אוֹת,” *TDOT*, 1.170-188.

meaning.<sup>61</sup> In the discussion on signs of protection, the view is commonly shared that:

The sign mentioned in Ex. 12 (P) is also a sign of protection, by means of which YHWH or the “destroyer” recognises the houses of the Israelites and thus “passes over” them. The sign, given in the form of a blood ritual, serves as a “safeguard,” originally (as an apotropaic ritual performed prior to moving flocks to new pastures) probably against the destroyer.<sup>62</sup>

Houtman is of the view that the blood was not a sign for the Israelites but for YHWH.<sup>63</sup> With reference to the blood, he thinks its protective power is restricted to the house.<sup>64</sup> The explanation of Exod 12:13 indicates that the blood was a protective sign, at the sight of which YHWH will “pass over” the Israelites and so spare their lives from the fatal blow he was about to strike against the Egyptians.

The Passover night was one of threat of danger and death. A curfew was therefore imposed on the Israelites, which called for vigilance on their part. Their “security lay in maintaining family solidarity within the portals of their hallowed homes”.<sup>65</sup>

For YHWH will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when he sees the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, YHWH will pass over the doorway, and will not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike *you* (Exod 12:23).

The term *מַשְׁחִית* in Exod 12:23 refers to the destroyer in relation to the tenth plague. It was time for the final, inevitable plague-death. The *מַשְׁחִית* was to act on behalf of YHWH to inflict death upon the first-born occupier of the houses without the blood-mark. YHWH would “leap over” or in other words, would not allow the *מַשְׁחִית* to enter into the blood marked doorway to bring death to the Israelite occupier. Though this plague is personified, it is not an independent demonic being. It could only operate within the limits fixed by God.<sup>66</sup> Houtman describes it as an angel, a destroyer which accompanied YHWH, entered the doors without the blood-sign, and

<sup>61</sup> Helfmeyer, “אֵיֶרֶךְ,” pp. 170-188.

<sup>62</sup> Helfmeyer, “אֵיֶרֶךְ,” pp. 170-188.

<sup>63</sup> Cornelius Houtman, *Exodus*, vol. 2. (Kampen: KOK Publishing House 1996), p. 185. See also Mek. 1, 56.

<sup>64</sup> Houtman, *Exodus*, p. 185. However, he makes reference to the fact that, according to Jewish exegesis, the sign is for the Israelites. See Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael *Pisha* 7.

<sup>65</sup> Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus*, p. 60.

<sup>66</sup> Cf Gen 20; 2 Sam 24:16; Isa 37:36; cf Job 1:12; 2:1-6.

did the killing.<sup>67</sup> He observes, “YHWH only restrains the destroyer if it tries to enter a home marked with blood.”<sup>68</sup> With respect to the destroyer, Park suggests it is possible that the assimilation of pre-Israelite demonology under the aegis of the Lord’s rule is reflected in the form of this account.<sup>69</sup> Cole sees the destroyer as the “angel of death”, comparing this idea with David’s vision in 2 Samuel 24.<sup>70</sup> Respecting the feast of the Passover, the portion of Jubilees related to the seeing of the blood of the lamb (*Jub.* 49:2-6), suggests that many agents of destruction are referred to as having been sent by the Lord against the Egyptians.<sup>71</sup> The blood of the victim on the doors of the houses is presented here, as being a sign to these powers of destruction, that they must avoid entering to destroy the lives of those within.<sup>72</sup> While in *Exod* 12:13 YHWH presents Himself as the destroyer, Moses in *Exod* 12:23, makes YHWH appear as guiding the operation; the actual destruction activity is to be done by an agent simply referred to as the destroyer.<sup>73</sup> There is however no contradiction here as YHWH obviously plays the role of restrainer but holds Himself responsible for the whole operation.

The power of protection here begins with YHWH, the “Restrainer” of the agent, and not necessarily the agent’s fear of the blood upon seeing it. The sight of the blood motivated the restrainer. The instruction was simply this; “none of you shall go outside the door of the house until the morning” (*Exod* 12:22). The blood was like a sign saying “out of bounds” or “no thoroughfare”. It set the boundaries at the time of danger. It stayed the destroyer outside the boundary and kept those within the boundary protected.

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<sup>67</sup> Houtman, *Exodus*, 2.193.

<sup>68</sup> Houtman, *Exodus*, 2.193.

<sup>69</sup> George A. Buttrick et al., *The Interpreters Bible*, Vol.1 (New York: Abingdon Press, 1952), p. 923.

<sup>70</sup> Cole, *Exodus*, p. 108.

<sup>71</sup> “For on this night there was the beginning of the feast and there was the beginning of joy. You continued eating the Passover in Egypt and all the powers of *Mastema* were sent to kill all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the first born of Pharaoh to the first born of the captive maidservant who was at the millstone and to the cattle”. See *Jub.* 49:2 in O. S. Wintermute, “Jubilees,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983).

<sup>72</sup> “And this is the sign which the Lord gave to them in every house where they saw the blood of a year-old lamb upon its doors so that they would not enter into the house to kill, they would pass over so that all who were in the house might be saved because the sign of the blood was on its doors. And the host of the Lord did every thing which the Lord commanded them. And they passed over all the children of Israel. And the plague did not come upon them to destroy any life from them whether cattle or men or dogs” (*Jub.* 49:3-4).<sup>72</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Richard Coggins, *The Book of Exodus* (Petersborough: Epworth Press, 2000), pp. 49, 51.



It was time for the final inevitable plague-death. The מַשְׁחִית was to act on behalf of YHWH to inflict death upon the first-born occupier of the houses without the blood-mark. YHWH would “leap over” or in other words, would not allow the מַשְׁחִית to enter into the blood marked doorway to bring death to the Israelite occupier. This is the sense in which blood functioned in the Passover episode as a protective mark employed to preserve life.

## **(2) Analogy from Cain’s Mark of Protection**

The mark of blood on the Israelite doorway at the time of the Exodus recalls the significance of the mark of Cain in protecting him from death. Gen 4:15 reads, “And YHWH set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him”. What is the meaning of this sign (אֹת) on Cain? The narrator is silent with regard to the exact nature of the mark. Though Driver notes, it is idle to speculate was this sign was,<sup>74</sup> it is worth exploring its significance for Cain’s life. God had pronounced his punishment on Cain for the fratricide he had committed. Cain’s fear was that whoever found him would kill him. YHWH promises to protect him. Though Cain remained under YHWH’s condemnation, he is still protected by this sign. The sign was to prevent anyone else from carrying out the role of blood-avenger. YHWH would therefore execute Cain’s punishment without anyone else’s intervention. Thus, this sign could be understood as a life-mark meant to avert death.

In his notes on Gen 4:15, Dake writes: “God did not give Cain a physical mark of any kind. Rather, the idea that God gave him a pledge that vengeance would be taken sevenfold on anyone who became his murderer”.<sup>75</sup> Westermann rightly observes that the context of the passage in Gen 4:11-15 shows clearly that Cain’s sign can only be meant as a protecting mark.<sup>76</sup> It was perhaps a mark of identification, a sign of protection meant to deter his attacker. It has been suggested that this sign was a tattoo mark or an incision on the face, circumcision, etc.<sup>77</sup> This mark might have

<sup>74</sup> S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis* (London: Methuen & Co., 1911), p. 67.

<sup>75</sup> Finis Jennings Dake, *Dake’s Annotated Reference Bible* (Lawrenceville, Georgia: Dake Bible Sale, 1963), p. 4.

<sup>76</sup> Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (Tr. J. J. Scullion S.J., London: SPCK, 1984), p. 313.

<sup>77</sup> Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, p. 314.

been something attaching to his body. Sarna notes that the Hebrew term אֹרֶחַ in Gen 4:15 “probably involves some external physical mark, perhaps on the forehead as in Ezek 9:4-6, serving as the blood of the paschal lamb smeared on the lintels and doorposts of each Israelite house in Egypt”.<sup>78</sup>

Both the Passover sign of blood and the sign of Cain seem to disclose a basic pattern of visible identification whose roots lie in protection and life – the potential avenger sees Cain’s sign and passes by without killing him. Thus, in the context of protection of life, just as the blood of the Passover was a life-mark, so was the mark of Cain. In the case of the Israelite firstborn at the Passover, this mark happened to be made of blood, a life-substance.

The question still remains as to the sense in which the blood could play the role of protecting life and averting death. Presumably, the blood could have been apotropaic in terms warding off the malignant spirit threatening to kill, and/or substitutionary in the sense of exchange of one life-blood for another life.

### (3) The Passover Blood and Apotropaicism

We may put the question thus: Could the Passover blood have been protective in the sense of warding off the מַשְׁחִית? <sup>79</sup> Was the פֶּסַח-blood itself inherent with apotropaic power or was it simply a mark for YHWH to identify his own? If there was no power of protection and repulsion of danger inherent in the blood itself, according to our study, then what could have been the significance of the blood-sign? In other words, what influence or impression could the blood have had on YHWH when He saw it on the doorway if it was not by itself meant to ward Him off along with the destroyer-agent, the מַשְׁחִית?

<sup>78</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis* (The JSP Torah Commentary; Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 35.

<sup>79</sup> The rite of smearing the doorway with blood in order to keep out the evil spirit occurs in customs of different cultures. Blood has been perceived as a door charm in many cultures. Parallels from other cultures concerning the rituals with apotropaic motives have been cited by many. For more ref., see MacCulloch, “Door”, pp. 846–52. Trumbull cites several examples of magical ornamentations pertaining to the door. There is also the example of the Chinese custom in which, in times of pestilence, sentences are written in human blood to be fastened on the doorposts for protection against diseases. See Trumbull, *The Threshold Covenant*, pp. 69-74, 323. Gray makes note of an offering that is presented at the threshold and the lintel smeared with blood. He observes that “According to some, this is done ‘for the sake of a blessing’, that none of the family may die”. Gray, *Sacrifice in the Old Testament*, p. 361.

At the Passover, the doorway had to be protected from evil so as to preserve the lives of the people inside from external threat of death. It was guarded by blood in order to prevent a malevolent spirit from crossing over the threshold into the house, to destroy lives. The mention of protection in the context of the Passover quickly brings to mind the question of the apotropaic significance of the rite. However, some scholars think the blood of the animal, in this context, is only a mark of protection instead of an apotropaic charm. Sarna argues that there is no warrant for the theory that blood played magic, an apotropaic role, that is, as a means of averting or overcoming evil or danger.<sup>80</sup>

To say blood on the doorway is apotropaic suggests that the blood itself is inherent with amuletic virtues or mysterious powers able to repel malevolent powers. This passage (“when I see the blood, I will pass over”) carries with it a language of protection which may be located in a system of communication among YHWH who either permits or restrains an agent of destruction, the Israelite on whose behalf the blood is spilt, the object on which the blood is daubed, and the animal victim whose blood is spilt. The blood is central, with power to communicate protection and life. In this scheme, something happens to all these players—the donor of the blood dies (*loss of blood here means loss of life*), the human offerer daubs the doorway with the blood of the animal, and God sees the blood of the animal-victim and keeps his promise—his part of the covenant—by sparing the life of the human offerer within the house. There is no indication in the Passover narrative that YHWH suggested the use of blood in order to scare Him away when He saw it on the doorway of the houses. However, there is also no textual suggestion that Passover blood could not have been apotropaic.

The apotropaic significance of the blood on the lintel and doorposts may find a parallel in the modern Jewish use of the *mezuzah*, which some see as a sort of protective element. An analogy from Jewish use of the *mezuzah*, may shed some light on how the Jewish people, presumably, interpret the historical significance of the protection of the doorway. The Old Testament enjoined the Israelites (Deut 6:9; 11:20) to write the words of the covenant upon the *mezuzot* of their houses and their

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<sup>80</sup> Sarna, *Exodus*, p. 55.

gates. By transference, the term *מזוזה* was made to apply to the passages, which were affixed to the doorpost in accordance with the injunction.<sup>81</sup> Even today, a *מזוזה* often is affixed to the entrances of apartment houses, public buildings, place of work, synagogues and even in cars in Israel as a means of invoking a blessing at the doorway.

The Jews have the words of the Covenant (Deut. 6:9; 11:13-21) written on a parchment and enclosed in a metal or wooden case or glass tube. This case or tube and its inscriptions are together referred to as the *מזוזה*. The parchment is rolled up and is inserted into the case in such a way that the Hebrew name *שדי*, "the almighty,"<sup>82</sup> is visible in a small aperture. The *מזוזה* is affixed to the doorposts of the house, in a slanting position to the upper part of the right hand doorpost, so that the upper part is inward and the lower part outward. Pious Jews, as they pass through the door, kiss the *מזוזה*, or touch it and kiss their fingers,<sup>83</sup> and say, "may God keep my going out and my coming in from now and evermore".<sup>84</sup> It seems the significance of identifying *שדי* as the "guardian of the House" suggests a Jewish belief that it is actually the *שדי* who does the protecting and not the *מזוזה*.

The *מזוזה* is a reminder, at the doors and at the gates of Jewish homes, of the Deuteronomic instruction to them to love YHWH with all their hearts, souls and might (Deut. 6:5), keep His words in their hearts (6:6), teach His words diligently to their children (6:7), and look to Him for all their needs (Deut 11:14-15). It is believed the *מזוזה* brings blessings to anyone that touches it with clean hands.<sup>85</sup> There is a reference in the Jerusalem Talmud, to the use of the *מזוזה* as a protective object

<sup>81</sup> Louis Isaac Rabinowitz, "mezuzah" in *EncJud* 11.1474-1477.

<sup>82</sup> The name *שדי*, *Shaddai* is written with the letters, *sheen, dalet, yod*. *שדי* means "The Power," or "The God that cannot be obstructed." Traditionally, these letters also serve as an acronym for of *שומר דלתות ישראל* meaning "Guardian of the doors of Israel." "The almighty" is understood as the protector, whose protection is invoked at the threshold of the doorway.

<sup>83</sup> Rabinowitz, "mezuzah", p. 1474-1477.

<sup>84</sup> Van Gennep here notes that "the verbal rite is here joined to the manual one." See Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, p. 24. He cites the Jewish practice of handling the mezuzah at the doorway as an example of rites of entering a house, which have their counterpart rites of exit.

<sup>85</sup> I. M. Casanowicz, "mezuzah," in *JEnc* 8.531-532.

(*Pe'ah* 1:1, 15d).<sup>86</sup> This implies that apotropaic powers were attributed to the מזוזה in Talmudic times. Some Jews in modern times even wear the מזוזה around the neck as a charm.<sup>87</sup> To some it is a symbol of good luck and Jewish identity.

In a theoretical sense, since the encased parchment of the two Deuteronomic scriptures owes its name to its affixation to the doorpost, there is a sense in which the blood-sign on the doorpost in the Old Testament may be referred to as a מזוזה of a kind. It is in light of this understanding that the blood-sign of the original Egyptian Passover may be said to have a close parallel to the modern day Jewish מזוזה, in its supposedly apotropaic function, which in later celebrations became a symbolic reminder of God's deliverance as well. Again, just as the מזוזה also serves to identify Jewish homes today, so did the blood on the doorposts serve to identify Israelite households when the מִשְׁחָה passed over the homes in Egypt. Though the מזוזה may be apotropaic, it is not to do with blood. However, the prominence of the מזוזה today apparently also evokes the protective significance of blood on the doorframe at the Passover.

Central to this discussion is the significance of blood, especially, in relation to its use in bringing protection. Blood rituals, marking the commencement and the conclusion of Moses' rescue-mission in Egypt, make very significant a further discussion of *Exod* 4:22-26 as providing an analogy for the Passover blood ritual. The question is, does the "bridegroom of blood" episode this text point to any possible role of blood in the Passover ritual in relation to how the blood protected life?

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<sup>86</sup> Here, a king by name Ardavan is said to have sent a precious gift to "*Rabbenu ha-kadosh*" and requested for a gift of similar value in return. The Rabbi sent him a mezuzah, but Ardavan returned it, complaining that it was a less valuable gift. The Rabbi responded, "You have sent me a gift which I am required to guard, whereas my gift will guard you." See also *Gen R.* 35:3.

<sup>87</sup> Rabinowitz, "mezuzah", pp. 1474 -1477.

#### IV. The “Bridegroom of Blood”

Circumcision has taken a prominent place in the expression of identity with respect to Israel’s covenant relationship with YHWH. Throughout the history of the Israelites, they have made the effort to observe this rite. Sarna considers the emphasis on the importance of the rite of circumcision as framing the story of Israel’s redemption from Egyptian slavery, and therefore observes that:

This emphasis was forcefully expressed in 4:24-26 when Moses set out to return to Egypt to commence his mission of liberation, and it is now stressed once again at the moment of the successful fulfilment of that mission.<sup>88</sup>

When we come to the mysterious episode of the “bridegroom of blood” in Exod 4:22-26, we enter one of the most difficult portions of the OT, the interpretation of which has perplexed many a theologian. The text reads,

On the journey, at the place they lodged, YHWH approached him and tried to put him to death. Then Zipporah took up a flint and cut off the foreskin of her son and touched his feet with it and said ‘you are my bridegroom of blood’. So it withdrew from him; and she said ‘a bridegroom of blood by circumcisions’ (Exod 4:24-26).

A variety of translations and interpretations have been offered for the narrative with respect to its meaning.<sup>89</sup> What has provoked the struggle on its interpretation is, among other issues, the absence of the mention of Moses by name in the Hebrew text. Significant here is that YHWH took circumcision so seriously that he was going to kill a male for non-performance of the rite. With reference to the phrase “sought to kill him”, one wonders who is this object of killing; is it Moses or his son? What is seen there is simply, “him”. Exod 4:25 suggests that it was Moses’ son because he had to be circumcised, but Exod 4:26 seems to point to Moses himself. As Moses is

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<sup>88</sup> Sarna, *Exodus*, p. 63.

<sup>89</sup> For further discussion of this issue, see Pamela T. Reis, ‘The Bridegroom of Blood; a New Reading’, *Judaism* 50 (1991), pp. 324-31; Godfrey W. Ashby, ‘The Bloody Bridegroom: The Interpretation of Exodus 4:24-26’, *ExpTim* 106 (1995), pp. 203-05; Allen S. Maller, ‘The Bridegroom of Blood’, *JBQ* 21 (1993), pp. 94-98; Seth D. Kunin, ‘The Bridegroom of Blood: A Structuralist Approach’, *JSOT* 70 (1996), pp. 3-16; Serge Provlov, ‘The Hero Bridegroom: On the Meaning and Origin of Exodus 4:26’, *Bib* 77 (1996), pp. 520-23.

the most important figure actively involved in the narrative, it is most likely he is the one to whom “him” applies here. Coggins approaches this uncertainty in a different way, suggesting that “whoever is meant, the Lord met him”.<sup>90</sup> It is conjectured that Moses’ life was suddenly in grave danger, due to an unexpected serious illness or some other divine incursion (cf. 2 Kgs 19:35),<sup>91</sup> though Houtman also argues that “in view of the employment of ‘son’ in Exod 4:23 one might say, that also in Exod 4:25, the firstborn son is meant.”<sup>92</sup> If Zipporah had to perform the task of circumcision, then it might have been because Moses could not do it due to the threat on his life.<sup>93</sup> The threat might have taken the form of illness, otherwise how could Zipporah have noticed the danger and performed the rite of circumcision?

Another question has to do with who was circumcised. Exod 4:25 clearly states that it was Moses’ son.<sup>94</sup> Is it conceivable that Zipporah circumcised Moses? We are not told specifically that Moses was circumcised. Zipporah quickly acts to avert disaster by circumcising her son and touching the feet of Moses with the bloody foreskin.<sup>95</sup> It is difficult to interpret her action. It is obvious that the one whose life is threatened is the one whose feet are touched with the bloody foreskin. Presumably it was Moses whose feet were daubed with his son’s blood of circumcision. The circumcised shed the blood and so did not need to be daubed with blood.

Another puzzle involves Zipporah’s statement, “Truly you are a bridegroom of blood by circumcision”. What exactly does this mean? . The expression חתן דמים, “a bridegroom of blood” is very ambiguous. The exact meaning and origin of this phrase is obscure.<sup>96</sup> The question is, who is this “bridegroom of blood”? Some think the expression under discussion was meant to connect Moses with what his wife had done, making her son’s circumcision count as the husband’s.<sup>97</sup> In any case, if she

<sup>90</sup> Coggins, *The Book of Exodus*, p. 23.

<sup>91</sup> Houtman, *Exodus*, vol. 1., p. 436.

<sup>92</sup> Houtman, *Exodus*, vol. 1., p. 437. Cf Exod 12:20.

<sup>93</sup> Houtman, *Exodus*, vol. 1., p. 437.

<sup>94</sup> Kunin suggests that it is likely that the child would be Gershom, Moses’ oldest son. See Kunin, ‘The Bridegroom of Blood’, pp. 3-16.

<sup>95</sup> In Exod 4:25 וַתַּגֵּעַ לְרַגְלָיו is literally, “and she touched (daubed) his feet”. Coggin thinks it is right to suppose “feet” here to be a euphemism for *genitals* (Coggin, *The Book of Exodus*, p. 23). The verb נָגַע means “to touch”, “reach”, or “strike”.

<sup>96</sup> It has been translated “a bloody husband” in the KJV (Exod 4:25, 26). The LXX has, τὸ αἷμα τῆς περιτομῆς τοῦ παιδίου μου “the circumcision blood of [my son]”.

<sup>97</sup> cf Isa 6:7, Jer 1:9. S.R. Driver, *The Book of Exodus*, p. 32.

saved her husband's life, it was at the cost of her son's life. Perhaps, we could read this statement "bridegroom of blood" from the point of view of Zipporah preserving the life of her husband, whom she would have lost without the application of the blood of circumcision to his feet. If this suggestion is acceptable, then the blood did not only bring life to the husband but also saved her from widowhood. By the shedding of blood, she fulfilled the blood covenant of circumcision and in the process she preserved their four-decade-old marriage.<sup>98</sup> Cassuto suggests that the "bridegroom of blood" is Moses because by salvation from death, he is symbolically reborn and remarried to his wife.<sup>99</sup>

According to Kunin, the "bridegroom of blood" narrative deals with symbolic death and rebirth. He adds that the text contains a sacrificial element – that is, the circumcision.<sup>100</sup> Kunin also argues that Moses becomes a "bridegroom of blood" to Zipporah, having been transformed into a proper husband by the sacrifice.<sup>101</sup> Ashby notes "circumcision is a certain kind of sacrifice, in which a small part of a male person is cut off. Blood is shed, and the blood and the foreskin presented as a token sacrifice for the whole person".<sup>102</sup> He adds that Moses' son's foreskin is the blood sacrifice demanded by Yahweh of the Hebrews.<sup>103</sup> He may be right, for there is the possibility that the blood was meant to satisfy YHWH that life has been shed in place of Moses' life. In this sense the blood becomes a life-saving instrument used to propitiate YHWH who was threatening to kill. In Exod 4 the blood of circumcision might only have been a sign to show that rites had been performed. Presumably, at the sight of it, YHWH spared the threatened life. However, it is apparent that the actual power lay in the satisfaction YHWH might have derived upon noticing that a command had been obeyed.

Interestingly enough, the episode of the "Bridegroom of Blood" suggests a life-protecting function of blood. Thus, in this context, besides covenant-making,

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<sup>98</sup> YHWH had said that his covenant will be in the flesh of Abraham and his descendants as an everlasting pact (Gen 17:12-13).

<sup>99</sup> Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, p. 60. Cassuto observes that Zipporah throws the foreskin at the angel's feet, not Moses. In effect what Zipporah is symbolically saying is "Take this in place of Moses".

<sup>100</sup> Seth D. Kunin, 'The Bridegroom of Blood', pp. 3-16.

<sup>101</sup> Kunin, 'The Bridegroom of Blood', pp. 3-16.

<sup>102</sup> Ashby, 'The Bloody Bridegroom', pp. 203-05.

<sup>103</sup> Ashby, 'The Bloody Bridegroom', pp. 203-05.



circumcision becomes a ritual of life-preservation through blood. This theme of preservation of life by blood, points to a close relationship between the blood of circumcision (Exod 4) and the blood of the Passover (Exod 12). In both these instances, YHWH comes as a “destroyer” and blood averts the threat of death. But does blood do this as an apotropaic element or substitutionary element? There appears a motive of substitution here meant to propitiate YHWH who threatens to kill – it is possible to think of YHWH or his agent as being propitiated or satiated upon seeing the blood than being warded off by it. This could be one way of interpreting the motive for the blood of circumcision here. The same can be said about the Passover blood rite on the doorway.

In the light of the foregoing discussion of the circumcision account in Exod 4:22-26, it is much better to agree with Coggins, that “it is at least clear that circumcision is regarded as an important preparatory rite – in this case, for the arrival in Egypt ready to carry out God’s commission”.<sup>104</sup> Exod 4:24-26 is a narrative whose assumptions about blood as protective are closest to that in the Passover narrative. We will therefore proceed to show what similar themes underlie the texts of the Passover narrative in Exod 12 and the circumcision narrative in Exod 4. The theory that blood-ritual has an appropriate magical efficacy which brings protection from danger seems to have a viable core in the proposition that the circumcision narrative in Exodus 4 can be cued to the Passover event in Exod 12, so as to suggest that the Exod 4:24-26 episode is an illustration (perhaps to Moses) of the significance of blood-ritual in averting danger. Let me now turn to discuss the question of the validity of this theory.

The strength of the argument for the life-sustaining or protective value of blood in terms of OT rituals rests on these two passages — Exod 12:1-30 and Exod 4:22-26. Apart from these passages, there is not the slightest evidence of any blood ritual with similar implications of protection elsewhere in the OT. The protective implication of the *לִפְנֵי יְהוָה* apparently is anticipated in Exod 4:21-23, which constitutes an admonitory prefix and lends support to the main theme for the

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<sup>104</sup> Coggins, *The Book of Exodus*, p. 24.

Passover account (Exod 12:1-52) — escape from the threat of death.<sup>105</sup> We will now look at some comparisons of the texts with the view of unveiling the similarity of the themes under-girding the narratives. The comparison of Exod 4:22-26 and Exod 12:1-20 reveals that they both present such inter-related theological themes as the threat of destruction, identity (identification through blood-rite) and deliverance. Within the context under discussion, both rites express the same understanding, in which the motivating theme is deliverance, explained here as the aversion of danger and death through blood ritual. Before the plague of the first-born God tells the Hebrews to slaughter a lamb (the paschal lamb) put its blood on the doorposts of their houses to protect them from the angel of death. By taking the foreskin of her son and placing the blood on 'his feet', Zipporah is making a sign of protection similar to the sign on the doorposts. In both cases, when YHWH saw the blood, he withheld his action.

One can understand therefore, from the circumcision performed by Zipporah, how the redactor or narrator appears to encapsulate in symbolic narrative the nature of Israel's deliverance and the major *coup* against Egypt, which YHWH was about to stage through the Passover.

The direction of thought of the narrator seems to set Exod 4:22-26 as a type of what will be happening in Exod 12 as far as the context of deliverance by blood ritual is concerned. The setting is one of an experience of danger and escape. Moses, is being positioned to bear symbolically, as it were, upon his own person, the physical and psychological threat that faces the people he is about to lead out of Egypt (Exod 12). This could count as one of the reasons for the threat; otherwise it is difficult to

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<sup>105</sup> As to the question of whether the narrative should be seen as a continuation of what has preceded or as a new episode, distinct from what has gone before, Coggins, also with uncertainty, says: "In the first case, the reference in vv. 22-23 to firstborn son might prompt the idea that the concern here is with Moses' failure to have circumcised his firstborn son. If on the other hand, we read this as a separate episode, we shall bear in mind that it contains no reference to this omission." See Coggins, *The Book of Exodus*, p. 23. Many other have argued that the whole text of Exod 4-12 has had different sources, which make it difficult to see any chronology in its content. But can the text here be read as it stands? It certainly cannot be read in isolation because it is not a self-contained unit; it functions instead as the introduction to a larger unit. It is an integral part of a unit extending at least from the call of Moses, through the plague narratives and consummated in the Passover event. We approach this study with the assumption that although most scholars do not see any chronology in the narrative of Exod 4-12, it appears that the sequence of the narratives themselves represent the whole picture of what the deliverance of Israel from Egypt entailed. In these chapters, the narrator aims to provide a theological reflection on the 'whole event' that immediately preceded and triggered the Exodus.

find a reason why it should happen at this point in time instead of occurring either earlier in Midian or later in Egypt after their entry.

In contributing to the discussion on the connection between the circumcision event in Exod 4:24-26, the Passover, and again the reference in Exod 12:48, Cassuto comments:

The lamb of the Egyptian Passover served as a substitute for the lives of the Israelite first born on the day that the Lord sent the destroyer to smite the first born of Egypt. This apart, the blood of the Passover sacrifice may also be regarded, like the blood of the circumcision...as a symbol of the dedication of the lives of the children of Israel to their God, and their readiness to shed their own blood, too, in his service should this be necessary.<sup>106</sup>

Reference can also be made to the circumcision narratives in both chapters. In Exodus 4, circumcision was needed directly for protection (Exod 4:25). However, in Exodus 12 its place in protection was only indirect through the Passover (vv. 43-49).

It is worth noting that the passage in Exod 12:43-49 sets forth who is qualified to partake of the festival, and the primary emphasis is on the rite of circumcision. It was a permanent ordinance of the Passover, setting forth the conditions under which sojourners among the people may eat the Passover meal. Circumcision was the physical token of God's covenant (Gen 17:11) and a symbol of Israelite identity. This made it the appropriate prerequisite for all who would celebrate and eat of the Paschal meal.

There may be several concepts in these texts calling for elaborate discussion, but the undoubtedly significant place of the "sight of blood" in both of these rituals is obvious for us. As one reads these texts, one notices the workability of inter-relating the two materials regarding the experience, which led to Zipporah's circumcision of her son before Moses entered Egypt after his call and the Passover event that immediately preceded Israel's departure from Egypt.

The Passover ritual served an apotropaic function and acted as a blood rite of initiation of Israel, YHWH's firstborn (Exod 4:22-23). A fulfillment of the significance of the Passover blood rite can be gleaned from the passage in Exod 4:24-26, which describes the circumcision of Moses' son. On account of Moses' neglect of

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<sup>106</sup> U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (tr. Israel Abrahams; Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1951), p.138.

the initiation rite of circumcision for his son, a threat of death rested upon Moses. A covenant had been neglected; a divine order had been violated, thereby disturbing the balance of the relationship between YHWH and Moses along with his family. A disastrous consequence, death, was imminent, if a ritual way of re-instituting the desired order was not effected. A protective ritual involving the daubing of Moses' generative instrument with blood could avert the threat of death. This was an apotropaic use of blood.

According to Fretheim, the Passover blood has no properties in and of itself that would automatically provide protection from an evil.<sup>107</sup> He does not see the blood-sign in and of itself as that which could ward off evil, but rather, he considers important the promise associated with the sign (Exod 12:13). He argues that a sign "for you" does not refer to God, but to the Israelites. He continues that "the sign was not simply a "marker", as if any colouring substance that caught the eye could do". I do not concur with Fretheim that the Passover blood has no apotropaic role, because there is no clear indication in the text that the blood did not ward off evil. However, referring to Lev 17:11, 14; Deut 12:23 and Ps 72:14, Fretheim points out that the blood was life and not a symbol in a weak sense, it was life given to provide life for the people who lived in the marked houses.<sup>108</sup> I agree with him on this point of substitution.

Obviously, blood serves as a marker in both the incident of the Passover and the circumcision. Blood is specifically used to mark out those who cannot be hurt by YHWH because they belong to him, that is the firstborn in the case of the Passover, and Moses in the case of the circumcision event. The implication here is that both events seem to lend credence to the protective function of blood in those specific contexts. It is also significant to note that the symbolic nature of blood may be different in the Passover and the circumcision. Context defines significance here. Both may relate to covenant, though not so obviously in the Passover. This is the achievement of fostering or securing life with the same instrument but different

<sup>107</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus: A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), p. 138.

<sup>108</sup> Fretheim, *Exodus*, p. 138.

procedures. Both these Passover and circumcision rituals suggest that the blood could either drive away or satisfy the angel/YHWH, thereby fostering protection and life.

## V. Was the Passover Ritual Purificatory?

Another question arises as to whether the Passover ritual was not purificatory in function. This question is significant because the nature of the prescriptions given for the choosing of the animal and the use of hyssop, both point to sacrificial requirements for ritual purification. Besides, a similar ritual at the doorpost in Ezekiel points to ritual purification in the Sanctuary.

### (1) **Sacrificial Prescriptions: The Animal and the Hyssop**

The sacredness of the doorway makes the *מזוזה* one of the sacred objects, which requires atonement. In this context, the *סף* at the doorway plays a role as the altar of the Israelite household at the *זבח פסח*. Thus, the *זבח פסח* could be described as a family sacrifice at the altar in the doorway. Obviously, blood is a vivid marker and the narrative demands nothing more than a blood-mark on the door. However, there is still another question needing response: If the blood was simply a paint-mark of identification, then why the conditions associated with sacrifice in the narrative? Two facts must be noted here. First, there was a sacrificial prescription for the animal whose blood was to be used for the sign: it was to be either a lamb or kid, was necessarily a male, one year old, and without blemish (Exod 12:3-5). That it was a sacrificial animal, clean and domesticated, means that the blood of a pig or a rat would have been unacceptable. Thus the blood of the Passover rite must have had the usual sacrificial function required of blood in every *זבח*.

Secondly, the use of the bunch of hyssop (*אגרת אֵזֶבֶת*) in Exod 12:22 is very significant in blood rites of purification. The hyssop is a small plant with many woody branchlets that made a convenient sprinkler in the ritual distribution of water and blood.<sup>109</sup> In the context of the first Passover in Egypt, the “bunch of hyssop” was

<sup>109</sup>Hyssop is a spice and herb plant that grows out of walls in Palestine (1 Kgs 5:13). It was particularly useful for sprinkling of liquid in purification rituals (cf. Lev 14: 5-7). See Hartley,

used as a brush for daubing the lintels and doorposts of the Hebrew homes with the blood of the lamb. However, the presence of the hyssop in the Passover rite also raises another significant question: Does it not point to a rite of purification? As is generally accepted, ritual purity is accomplished by sprinkling the blood in the temple; similarly, in the household, purity is accomplished by using hyssop to distribute water and blood. In cleansing the “leprous” house, the priest takes two birds, cedar-wood and crimson yarn and hyssop; he slaughters one of the birds over fresh water in an earthen vessel; he takes the cedar wood and the hyssop and the crimson yarn, along with the living bird, and dips them in the blood of the slaughtered bird and the fresh water, and sprinkles the house seven times. He then discharges the living bird into the open field outside of the camp/city; so he must make atonement for the house, and it will be clean (Lev 14:49-53). In this rite, we see hyssop used in applying blood to objects as found in the case of the daubing of the doorposts with blood.

In the cleansing of the cured *מצרע* (Lev 14:4, 6, 49, 51-52) and the cleansing of the corpse-contaminated person with the rite of the red cow (Num 9:6, 18), hyssop was used along with cedar-wood and scarlet. This suggests that hyssop could be a ritual purgative of some sort, a suggestion that seems to find support in Ps 51:7 (Heb. 51:9) where *אֶזְזֶה* symbolically is used in a cleansing rite; “purge me with hyssop, and I will be clean.” Is there any suggestion of a link between the Passover and purity in the creation of a ritually clean space and people? I must say that though the purificatory function of blood cannot be disproved in the Passover narrative; there is nothing in the narrative, which supports the purificatory function of blood in its application to an object here, that is the doorpost and lintels. In the Passover rite, the hyssop appears as an applicator of blood, as it is in the rite of the cured *מצרע*, unlike the case of the case of the cleansing of the corpse-contaminated where the hyssop is burnt into ashes with the red cow and other elements. Two points are worthy of note here: first, neither the red heifer rite nor the initial rite of the cured *מצרע* performed outside the camp can be described as sacrifices, though the Passover is. Secondly,

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*Leviticus*, p. 195. For further discussion, see R. K. Harrison, “The Biblical Problem of Hyssop,” *EvQ* 26 (1954), pp. 218-24.

though both the first two rites may be considered as cleansing, it is not straightforward to say the same about the Passover. These points show that the hyssop may be used in both sacrificial and non-sacrificial contexts as well as both purificatory and non-purificatory contexts. Thus, one can discount the argument that the Passover rite had a purificatory quality because hyssop is a purificatory element. Presumably, in the Passover rite, the hyssop was used merely as a ritual applicator of blood because of its physical qualities of holding fluids.

Apart from the narrative's description of the Passover as **זבח**, the specific choice of the blood of a sacrificial animal without blemish, and the use of hyssop in the application of this blood, suggest that the blood was more than a mere mark of identification; it was also an element of a sacrifice applied to a prescribed location or object on behalf the lives of the Israelites. In such a sacrifice, the **מזוזות** play the role of the altar. An example of this is found in the temple ritual in Ezekiel in which the **מזוזות** were daubed with blood. This seems to lend support to a sacrificial ritual at the doorway.

## (2) **The **מזוזות** Ritual in Ezekiel**

In the Israelite society, the temple system symbolized the culture of the people of God. It was the centre of Old Testament life, as its rituals and officials regulated and ordered the system of life within the Israelite social body. Thus, the perception of the sanctuary as the residence of God became the background against which all else was defined as either pure or impure. The sanctuary and its remarkable cult stood at the very centre of Israelite religious outlook and rites. The sanctuary or temple was marked as a sacred space. It had boundaries and an entry point which had to be protected, because when an unacceptable (e.g., blood of hunted animal or unclean animal), unclean person (e.g., **מצרע** or **נדה**) or malevolent forces crossed the boundary drawn to guard sacred space, impurity occurred and the sanctuary was polluted. Pollution must be eliminated from holy space. In such a situation, a sacrificial ritual of blood becomes an appropriate response. A ritual manipulation of blood in the temple involves putting it on the sancta including the altar, doorframe and other furniture within the Holy Place and Holy of Holies. In Ezek 45, sacrificial

blood for atoning purposes at the sanctuary is located on both the altar and the doorway.

It appears the original Passover portal sacrifice was domestic with apotropaic implications, while that of Ezekiel's era was located in the temple for purificatory purposes. The transition from domestic to temple portal sacrifice is difficult to tell. By the time of Ezekiel,<sup>110</sup> the blood was put on the מזוזת of the house, that is the temple (Ezek 45:18-20). A semblance of this blood ritual to that of the Exodus פסח is clear here. The blood ritual of daubing the מזוזת is conspicuous in the rituals at the doorway in both Ezek 45 and Exod 12. In that context, the earlier conception of the domestic ritual of applying blood to the door lintel and the מזוזת as apotropaic tended to give place to the conception of it as purificatory in the context of blood ritual in the temple.<sup>111</sup>

It is not my purpose in this chapter to examine how the life-preserving function of the portal blood ritual was transformed from a household ritual into a temple ritual of purification, because this will involve too much speculation. In fact, the OT is silent on the survival of the practice of the portal sacrifice among the Israelites between the time of Moses and Ezekiel. We will rather turn our attention to the question of the extent to which the daubing of the doorway of the temple with blood at the time of Ezekiel closely related to the daubing of the doorway at the Egyptian Passover. Did these two kinds of daubing have a common purpose?

The instruction of the Sovereign Lord to his people in Ezek 45:18-20 was to take a young bull without defect and purify (חטאת) the sanctuary. The priest was to put some of the blood of the חטאת offering on the מזוזת of the house, the four corners of the upper ledge of the מזבח and the מזוזת of the gate of the inner court as well (Ezek 45:19). Here the temple is referred to as בית, "house". This annual חטאת-

<sup>110</sup> The period of the ministry of Ezekiel may be reliably placed between 594 and 571 B.C.

<sup>111</sup> Before the blood covenant at Sinai (Exod 24: 8), the OT record points to blood sacrifice performed by the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is possible their children also individually performed such sacrifices. However, from the Sinaitic era, Aaron and his descendants were consecrated as priests, publicly responsible for the offering of sacrifice on behalf of the individual Israelite and the nation Israel as a whole.



blood ritual was to be performed on the first day of the first month of the year. The purpose was to make atonement for the temple.<sup>112</sup>

Like the prescriptions for the Passover victim, the temple doorway sacrifice requires the blood of a young male domestic sacrificial animal without defect and certainly one which has never been put to work. Though the *מזוזה* ritual here compares with that of the Passover, it is difficult to tell whether this Ezekiel account bears any connotation of apotropaic value of blood. But the life-preserving implication of blood on the doorposts is evident in both cases. In both, the *מזוזות* of the house are daubed with blood, in both, death is prevented by the presence of blood. In the case of Ezekiel, the “un-sinning” of the sanctuary and atonement of the temple removes sin and impurity, thereby nullifying their consequence, which is death. However, there is a marked difference between these two portal sacrifices. We see a shift from the domestic daubing of residential doorposts to the priestly daubing of the doorposts of the temple.

Both are annual sacrifices in the same month but are performed on different days: the *חטאת* and atonement blood ritual in Ezekiel was to be performed on the first and seventh days (Ezek 45:18), while the Passover blood ritual was fixed for the fourteenth day (Exod 12:2, 6; Ezek 45:21). Again, while Moses categorically states that the blood was a sign for the sight of YHWH who will avert the threat of death, thereby preserving the life of his people, Ezekiel focuses on the blood as a means of *חטאת* and atonement of the temple owing to the sin and impurity which, presumably, have already occurred. With regard to Ezek 45:18-20, the most important comment we can make is that the narrative does not suggest any apotropaic implications of the portal rite. Neither can it be said that the doorway ritual in Ezekiel lends support to the idea of a purificatory function of the Passover blood-rite at the doorway. Similar rites may have different functions in different contexts. This implies blood may be playing different roles in the Exodus and Ezekiel portal sacrifices.

<sup>112</sup> The sanctuary is the object of the *חטאת* ritual (Ezek. 45:18) while the temple was the object of the *atonement* ritual (Ezek 45:20). In either case, the idea is the same: the “un-sinning” blood is employed for the direct purification (or purgation) of the sanctuary (or temple). Both *כפר* and *חטאת* can be understood in terms of purification in this context and the blood on both altar and the doorposts effects this purification.

## VI. Concluding Summary

There are various examples of the custom of smearing blood at the doorway for purificatory purposes. An example is that of the Dayak who do it as a means of expiation for unchastity.<sup>113</sup> But the difficult question here is whether the Passover sacrifice at the doorway was to propitiate YHWH, and so unite Him with the Israelites, to repel the evil influences of the destroyer, or remove contamination of uncleanness from the people in the blood-marked houses.

The deduction that blood is the most vital body substance essential to life accounts for its prominent role in the OT sacrificial system.<sup>114</sup> This justification is true for both the Passover sacrifice in Egypt and the episode of the circumcision performed by Zipporah. The Passover of the Exodus has to do with the preservation of the life of God's people. It was linked to the tenth and final plague in which God allowed his messenger to strike the firstborn of the Egyptians (Exod 12:12-13, 23, 27). In the event of threshold blood sacrifice, the lives of the firstborn of the Israelites were spared.

The implication of the Passover daubing of the doorway with blood is clear: it was to preserve life by way of warding off attack from evil and threat of death. The almost parallel rite in Ezek 45:18-20 is rather purificatory in function. But, to say that the Passover blood rite was for purification is to suggest that the passages of the Israelites' house were polluted and therefore required decontamination with blood, or that the blood rite was intended to prevent the pollution of the passage, which must remain uncontaminated. That may be true for the Ezekiel portal blood ritual at the temple doorway and gate, but not for the Passover. That the Passover sacrifice was also meant for the preservation of life by way of purifying the sanctuary and its sacred objects, is therefore a matter of speculation.

Comparing the temple *מזוזה* ritual (Ezek 45:18-20) and the earlier common house *מזוזה* ritual (Exod 12:1-20), each of these rituals discloses one significant aspect

<sup>113</sup> Spenser St John, *Life in the Forest of the Far East*, (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1974 [1862]), p. 157.

<sup>114</sup> Another insignificant body substance is fat.

of Israelite blood sacrifice through the daubing of the entrance of the house. There is a common idea behind both of them: blood ritual daubing of the *מזוזת* and lintel as practiced by the Israelites, ensured protection of the entrance against anything malevolent that may enter to destroy the life within the house. With regard to the life beyond the *מזוזת* of the temple, we are to refer to God, the source of life. Life beyond the *מזוזת* of the Israelite homes in Egypt refers to the Israelites staying indoors the night of the Passover before the evasion of Egypt by the *משחית*. We may remark, that in the case of the Passover, it is the *משחית* or God its restrainer who passes over the door, not over the threshold through the door. For this reason, the Passover experience cannot be interpreted in the context in which Van Gennep discusses the rites of passing through the door. Neither does the discussion of the Passover rite fall into the category of what Trumbull describes as the rite of welcoming a guest,<sup>115</sup> for the intention of the Passover blood rite was rather to do the contrary, to ward off the *משחית*, an unwelcome guest.

While the examples most scholars focus on a malevolent spirit seeing the sign of blood and being warded off, the blood-sign in Exodus was not for restraining the destroyer directly, but rather to cause YHWH, the Benevolent Being who prescribed it, to restrain the destroyer from its death mission among the Israelites. The blood by itself was not inherent with a power that could scare away the *משחית*, neither was it meant to scare away YHWH. It was simply a mark of identification to YHWH, designated for His use.<sup>116</sup>

The Passover narrative makes clear the use of blood as only a “sign” or “mark” of identification. The blood on the doorframe played a role in identifying those households dedicated to YHWH for His protection from the plague of death. Furthermore, it was not only the visibility of the blood of a sacrificial animal to YHWH or the *משחית* that mattered, but also the positioning of the blood at the

<sup>115</sup> Trumbull, *The Threshold Covenant*, pp. 66-74.

<sup>116</sup> In the Passover narrative, it is not the evil-eye (of a destroyer) that feared the blood of the victim, but YHWH, seeing the blood-mark as his own prescription, restrains the destroyer from the houses identified with it. YHWH chose what He wanted to see. The narratives do not say He chose what could scare away the destroyer. It is thus, rather to the “restrainer” of the destroyer that the blood is significant here.

doorway. If YHWH simply needed to see it, then it could have been marked anywhere on the house and He would see it anyway. But YHWH did not need the blood sign only in order to identify the houses of the Hebrews; the people also needed its ritual effect at the doorway, for the process of going in and coming out was a ritual. Moreover the position of the sign at the doorway could reinforce its apotropaic significance.

Our investigation also leads us to the following conclusions:

1. Both the circumcision in Exodus 4 and the Passover ritual as discussed in the main texts of this study appear to bear the same theme: danger of destruction and protection (rescue). In both, blood rite is a statement of identity, a statement of God-relatedness as well as avoidance of divine judgment on the unmarked homes. The “bridegroom of blood” episode and the Passover blood-sign are both a threat of death and the preservation of life.
2. There is no scriptural indication in the original Passover text that the houses of the Israelites were impure or contaminated and so needed cleansing as was the case later for the temple, in the Ezekiel text (Ezek 45). However, it would be hasty to conclude that the doorway ritual of the Passover might therefore not have been purificatory in its purpose. Our discussion above has shown that the use of the bunch of hyssop in applying the blood of a clean unblemished sacrificial animal points to a sacrifice of purification. It could be said that the blood and the hyssop suggest the presence of uncleanness, which is dangerous and therefore must be removed by blood. But we cannot explain how uncleanness could have been caused. Blood is not purificatory in both Exod 4:24-26 and Exod 12 - at least there is no evidence of this in these narratives.
3. God required a sacrificial framework, a sacred symbol as it were, to identify His own people in order to preserve their lives and He chose blood, “liquid-life” which could wet the doorway and leave a visible inkling. Blood, which represented life, at the same time, could indicate that death had taken place wherever it was found. In the Passover event, it could also mean the death of a victim was a substitute for the Israelites. Blood is substitutionary in both Exodus accounts: in return for the visible presentation of “life” (blood), the demon/angel/deity spares human life. This points to the fact that blood/life has been shed in place of another life.

It must be noted that in the case of Moses blood is directly applied to the flesh to avert the threat of death; similar is the case of the *מצרע* where blood is applied to the flesh to give it life. However, for the protection of the first-borns of the Israelites, blood was applied on their behalf to the doorpost of their abode rather than directly to their bodies. If anything, blood repels the supernatural in averting death. However, one must not discount the fact that the idea that blood is life corresponds to the narratives' need for something to give life.

Lev 17:11 instructs that blood be put on the altar for sacrifice because of the life in the body. The rationale for the Israelite use of blood in sacrificial rituals must be this: if blood is the primary vital substance that sustains human and animal life, then this "liquid life" must be the most appropriate and desirable potent substance for life-affirming rituals. Thus, the Israelite notion of blood as life underlies its ritual use. From the realization of the vital power of blood was born the belief and practice of blood rituals of covenant, consecration, purification and protection.<sup>117</sup> My argument in this chapter is that though the blood rite of the Passover and the "bridegroom of blood" episode had more than just one simple function, the fact that it was meant to give life is clear. In the context in which both the circumcision in Exodus 4 and the Passover ritual were performed, the common effect of blood was protective. However, this protection of life seems to have worked in two different ways, namely apotropaic and substitutionary. In light of the understanding of blood as life, we should not overlook the fact that what is presented in these Exodus stories here can be seen in terms of the preservation of life from dangerous beings who are seen to be bent on taking life. In other words, the sight of blood seems to have been intended to satisfy these beings rather than repel them. Thus the idea of the blood preserving life by way of substituting the shed blood for the life of a threatened person (life for life) could be a more convincing explanation for the manner in which blood brought life to both Moses and the first-born in these Exodus episodes.

In light of the foregoing arguments, the narratives of the Passover and "bridegroom of blood" episode, read against its broader context of rescue from death

<sup>117</sup> Milgrom notes that the term *ḥayy* itself probably means "protection" (cf Exod 12:27 with Isa 31:5). He notes that the Passover rite is parallel in Babylonian Namburbi rituals in which blood and other apotropaics are smeared on doors and keyholes in order that the evil [plague] may not enter the house. See Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, p. 1081.

or preservation of life, help the reader to identify the place of blood in the rituals as a vital fluid used in preserving life.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Summary and Conclusion

This study demonstrates that there is a relationship between the general idea of fluids as giving life (from the physiological, Old Testament, Israelite/Judahite culture, and non-Israelite ideas such as Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Greek), and the ritual function of blood in the OT. In an attempt to explain the role of blood in rituals as life-fluid, I have argued that the notion of fluids giving life in Israelite/Judahite thought lends support to the OT concept of blood as being life and containing life as expressed in the context of blood sacrifice in Lev 17:11, 14. This implies that if we are to fully appreciate the significance of blood in OT sacrifices and other non-sacrificial rituals, we may as well need to view its function within the context of “fluids being life” both physiologically and ritually.

In chapter 1, we saw that blood, in the context of OT anthropology, has a wide meaning that goes beyond the physiological. The chapter indicated the nature of blood symbolism within the wider social and ritual context of Israel, noting its potency and ritual capacity to maintain the physical life of an individual as well as possessing social and religious significance. Our discussions in this chapter have looked at blood from the perspective of its place within the individual’s physical body and how it influenced social life. There is no suggestion that blood acquires a new meaning when outside the body. Focusing on blood, we have shown that in the body, blood gives life to the body as fluids in general are perceived in Hebrew thinking as “life-giving” and that when blood leaves the body, it remains alive and therefore can still be manipulated to preserve the life of the body in the ritual context. The discussions in that chapter followed an anthropological focus, not just on how blood re-incorporated a person into his community, but equally on how it separates people (death) from their community. The chapter therefore underscored how the Israelite struggled in handling blood to hold on to his/her relationship to his/her society and

with God. Blood regulated relationships on the lines of absence and presence in one's community, separation and inclusion, life and death.

A coherent account of Israelite/Judahite concept of life and death, and the place of fluids in this concept requires the use of an interpretative model, not only to understand the available literary evidence but also to locate and interpret missing information. One way of reconstructing a clearer picture is by exploring available data from archaeology, in addition to the OT text.

Chapters 2 and 3 examined the representations of the absence and presence of fluids and moisture in relation to the body, an idea central to the Israelite/Judahite concepts of life and death. These chapters dealt with the association of absence of fluids with death and dryness. Each of these chapters contributes important new insights into how the Israelite and OT concept of life and death may be viewed in the context of the presence or absence of fluids and moisture in relation to the body. In Israelite thought, life is viewed in terms of wetness and death in terms of dryness. These chapters have investigated issues of life and death from the perspectives of physiology, OT metaphor of dryness, and archaeology. The implication is that fluids, including blood, represent a key prerequisite of life.

The argument of Chapter 2, regarding the association of fluids with life, is reiterated by an examination of Jewish burial practices in Chapter 3 with two implications: First, the question of what the supply of liquid-vessels in the Judahite tombs mean is also very significant. Grave goods allow archaeologists to draw inferences about the age, gender, social status and also, the perceived needs of the deceased in the afterlife. In this study, I have argued that though the Hebrew text does have little to offer us regarding the anthropomorphic characterisation of the **נִפְתָּאִים** as quasi-mortals who hunger and thirst and therefore require food and drink, the archaeological evidence of drink-vessels adduced by us in this study may point towards a semblance of a notion among the Israelites, that personality does not disappear – the dead-**נִפְתָּאִים**, in their weakened form of personality, needed fluids to quench their thirst and sustain their weak or shady forms of life; that Judahite tombs were furnished with food and other provisions of everyday needs, points to an ancient Judahite conception that the dead have a form of life. A person lives on after death,



though in a weak form of existence as part of the **רפאים** in She'ol.<sup>1</sup> We have been able to look at the grave vessels, and with assumptions about their functions, made a statement about a possible Judahite death belief concerning the physical need of the **רפאים** for fluids in the afterlife, thereby enforcing our theme of fluids giving life.

We have also noted that Israelite ideas about the afterlife and the world beyond this life had some marked correspondences with some Egyptian and Greek ideas. I must admit that drawing a conclusion from the presence of drink-vessels in Judahite tombs regarding the need of the dead for fluids and reconstructing an aspect of ancient Israelite death belief upon this may be an inadequate choice of one of the possibilities for the meaning of this burial practice. But I must also argue that such a speculation from archaeological material would be more intelligent and plausible than arguing only from Hebrew textual sources which lack any evidence.

Secondly, the Jewish practice of ossilegium points to the fact of the belief that death is a process, the finality of which is seen in the denudation and desiccation of the bones. The distinctiveness of blood among the fluids of the body can also be found in the fact that it may lead to biological death when it issues excessively out of the body. However, it is not only the cessation of biological life in the excessive issue of blood that could be understood as death. The outflow of the fluid of decay appears as a natural symbol marking the decomposition of the corpse as an intermediary stage of death - a gradual irreversible process involving a separation between the flesh and the bones.

This thesis has briefly explored OT death beliefs in chapter 3, focusing on the implications of loss of moisture or wetness in bones and plants. One of the significant ways of looking at life in the OT is by looking at the metaphorical use of moisture in poetry as explored in Chapters 3. Both dry bones and dry plants are imageries of death in Israelite thought. Thus, evidence from the imagery of dry bones and plants unambiguously reveals consistency in the OT idea of fluids giving life where dryness and death are concerned. Plants dry up when dead; dry bones indicate complete death. Thus, dryness, in the context of this study, has an obvious affinity with the

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<sup>1</sup> Pedersen, discussing the cult of the dead among the Israelites, observes that the dead had passed over into another form of existence, in which they were understood as being **אלהים**. In order to benefit from the power of these divine beings, they were invoked. See *PI*, 3-4. 485.

finality of death. But it must also be understood that death is a process in which “wetness” provides room for a symbolic representation of the process of “dying”, indicated by the constant, irreversible outflow of blood and fluid of decay after the “initial” or biological death. Paradoxically, wetness of the body and bones symbolizes life. Life is always characterized by the presence of body fluids as well as spirit (רוח).<sup>2</sup> It will not be difficult to illustrate this point by citing a few of the many examples, but I have given here a fairly comprehensive example of this because the literary information serves to indicate that this physiological understanding must have persisted throughout the period during which the OT must have come into being. The ideas are widespread throughout OT literature that uses plant imagery (e.g., the Prophets and Poetry). In the case of Ezekiel, the writer might have been close to the Priestly tradition and so might have known Leviticus and the various ideas about fluids and life in Leviticus.

It is also worth noting that common to the death beliefs associated with the practice of ossilegium and Ezekiel’s vision is the imagery of dry bones representing death. Contrasting the process of death in the context of ossilegium with the content of Ezekiel’s vision, one can see the process of reconstruction of the dry bones into a living body as a reverse of the liminal period’s process of decomposition in the former. On the basis in the facts of chapters 2 and 3, it should be possible to relate this theme to how moisture and life contribute towards understanding the blood ritual in the OT.

Chapters 4 and 5 have shown how the Hebrew notions of blood ritual can provide another perspective for our inquiry into the significant role of blood in human life. These chapters concentrate on the ritual significance of blood. My question has had to do with the function of blood in ritual in general and on the altar in particular. It is reasonable to suppose that the perceived ritual functions of blood are associated with the physiological idea that blood is life. In viewing blood rituals in Leviticus and others in Exodus from the perspectives of modern anthropology of rituals, I offer what I hope is another direction in thinking about the significance of blood in OT sacrifices in particular and in general, another approach to understanding the role of fluids, such as water and blood, in bringing life to a person. These chapters on blood ritual have

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<sup>2</sup> The flowing fluid is a symbol of life, as seen in the case of rivers, streams and a microcosm of these in the form of blood circulation in the body.

some implications for blood sacrifice in general. Blood in Israelite rituals should be seen from the perspective of fluids giving life. The foregoing suggestion must be understood as an attempt at finding the ultimate meaning by which one can make sense of the place of blood in sacrifice. Chapters 4 and 5 have discussed the ritual use of blood in light of the conclusions of the earlier chapters. This discussion has led to the observation that, in general, blood rituals, especially sacrifices, have often been interpreted as purificatory or protective.

Most of the thesis has been devoted to showing that blood is fundamentally associated with the vivification of the body. If blood is life in the flesh then it must give life to the flesh. But this cannot be done by way of consuming it because that is strongly prohibited (Lev 17:10-14).<sup>3</sup> Blood could be applied typically to the flesh as is evident in the case of the cured “מצרע”, presumably, in order to reintroduce life to dead parts of the body. Underlying this ritual is the understanding that blood retains its essential character even when removed from the body. External blood still has its life as shown by the cured “מצרע”-ritual. It is possible that this is a factor in the Passover and Moses’ story.

The Passover narrative is one story, which suggests that blood has protective function. The narrative on “bridegroom of blood” in which Moses’ life is saved tends to point to the protective argument and lends support to the apparent apotropaic or substitutionary nature of the Passover blood. However, we must not put more weight on these because these stories do not add up to a general protective function of blood. They simply represent a protective use of blood in a specific situation and this does not necessarily credit blood with an inherent protective value. In the case of Moses, the blood is applied directly to the body. In that of the Passover, the blood is applied directly to the doorway but not to the body of the first-born who needs protection. In both narratives, the function of blood remains somewhat mysterious.

There are no good grounds either, for asserting that blood has a purificatory function in these Passover and circumcision narratives. It is unlikely that the blood daubed on the doorway or on the body of Moses is purificatory. This poses a big question about

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<sup>3</sup> Blood cannot be consumed blood because it is alive and cannot be killed because it is inherently life. Living things cannot be eaten alive.

the function blood on the altar. It is not my intension to provide a solution to this question. Any argument that it is unlikely that the blood on the altar was purificatory undermines the argument of Milgrom for the purgation role of blood. But from the evidence we have considered, it is possible that: like the doorpost, the altar is being marked out as God's approved sacred location for offering sacrifices. Blood does nothing to the altar at all and it is merely the way that the blood is ritually disposed of. In other words when you put the blood on the altar what matters is not the question of what it does to the altar but rather, what it does to the one on whose behalf it is put there. Thus blood ritual in the OT must be understood as simply presenting blood to God at the prescribed place on behalf of the life of a person.

### **(1) Dietary Prohibition of Blood**

Our conclusion drawn from our discussions in chapters 2 and 3, that the loss of fluids renders the body dead and the presence of fluids indicated the presence of life, point to a significant implication for the dietary prohibition against blood, that is, meat is totally dead only when it is totally bloodless. The discussion in this section shows that eating meat really presented an awesome challenge to the Israelites. They could eat meat, specifically of clean animals, but they could not eat blood.

Douglas Davies rightly observes that, blood is a highly charged symbolic medium, and that it was because of the close association of blood with life itself and as a vehicle for covenant relationships with the deity that the Jews forbade the ingestion of blood.<sup>4</sup> The notion of life and death in relation to how body fluids from animals, with specific reference to blood, are handled in the context of OT dietary regulations and other religious rituals. With regard to animal fluids, such as blood and milk, more attention is given specifically to blood in the OT. The nature of such a complex body fluid calls for analysis from the perspectives of the OT. Many cultures, ancient and modern, recognized and still recognize from their day to day observation an intimate link between life and the red bodily fluid called blood, hence

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<sup>4</sup> Douglas J. Davies, *Anthropology and Theology* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), p. 106.

the universal recognition of the potency of blood.<sup>5</sup> This is clearly expressed in the religious beliefs and practices of the Israelites.

The most crucial verses of the Old Testament articulating the prohibition on eating blood are Gen 9:4; Lev 7:26, 27; 17:10-14; 19:26; Deut 12:16, 23; I Sam 14:32, 34 and Ezek 33:25. The connection of נפש with דם in these passages on the prohibition of blood-diet is very significant in understanding the rationale underlying the prohibition. The underlying idea is that the blood in meat must be thoroughly drained out of the meat before it is eaten because eating flesh with blood in it is just the same as eating the life-blood. In our texts the more direct dietary prohibition phrase common to all of the texts is לֹא תֹאכְלוּ, "You must not eat", appears in each of the following texts: Gen 9:4; Lev 3:17b; 7:26a; 17:12b, 14c; Deut 12:16. These texts deal with the prohibition of the eating of meat (בשר) containing (דם) blood. The term בשר is used of the flesh of an animal or a person. Obviously, the significance of widening the implications of the prohibition to embrace the direct ingestion of raw blood cannot be overlooked. Blood is designated as the vehicle of life, נפש, as noted by various references in the OT.

Every life belongs to God, and since blood of every kind, whether human or animal is life, it belongs to God. This prohibition therefore indicates the limit to which the Israelites could control their diet. For the Israelites, God's place as the ultimate regulator of their dietary practices must be recognized. They could eat the meat but the blood belonged solely to God. The blood of domesticated animals was the means by which atonement was made, and therefore, to eat it was to profane it. Also, hunted land and aerial animals that were killed for food in Israel, were drained of their blood as much as possible, and covered with dust (Lev 17:13-14). The primary rationale for the dietary stipulation regarding the separation of meat and blood in the OT, that is "the life of the flesh is in the blood," presents other secondary

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<sup>5</sup> In many cultures, the drinking of blood implied an actual sharing in life symbolized by blood. Donald A. Mackenzie notes, "Inspiration was derived by drinking blood as well as drinking intoxicating liquors." See D. A. Mackenzie, *Myths of Babylonia and Assyria* (London: The Gresham Publishing Company Ltd. n.d.), p. 48. An Egyptian text from the 12<sup>th</sup> century B.C. refers to consuming blood in fellowship rites among Semites on the border of Egypt; see J. Cerny, "Reference to Blood Brotherhood among Semites in an Egyptian Text of the Ramesside Period," *JNES* 14 (1955), pp. 161-163; see also Robertson W. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (2nd ed.; London: Black, 1907), pp. 315-320.

reasons connected with the primary. These secondary reasons are: first, care must be taken to avoid eating the mixture of meat which is symbolic of death and its blood which is life; secondly, meat must be completely dead before consumption, therefore all the blood must be fully discharged in order to visibly ensure complete lifelessness of the flesh. The essential features of the OT and Jewish dietary prohibitions on the eating of blood may now be summed up: Bloodless flesh (meat) and death are closely associated in Israelite thought. Blood and meat form a contrastive pair in the OT dietary system, articulated by the stipulation prohibiting the eating of meat with blood.<sup>6</sup>

We may conclude that Israelite ideas about blood-taboo, their attitudes, and negative conceptions of blood are part of their reaction, which rejects any person, action or idea likely to contradict their cherished classification. It must be noted that though the OT sees blood in both negative and positive lights, the concept of blood as life dominates that of death. We see this clearly in the ritual manipulation of blood to give life.

There has been a tension with regard to what the blood does in rituals. Basically, the question has often been whether its ritual function is protective or purificatory. The present study reaches conclusions about the life of the body and blood rituals that are different from those of most scholars.

With Milgrom and a few others functioning as important partners in this dialogue, the conclusion I have reached with reference to blood rituals registers both agreement with some of these scholars and disagreement with others. On the one hand, scholars like Milgrom have concluded that the blood on the sacred object has purificatory function. On the other hand, some scholars favour an apotropaic role for

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<sup>6</sup> However, the prohibition against the mixing of what must be separated could be another possible explanation for the rationale. The injunction on blood-diet states, "But be sure you do not eat the blood, because the blood is the *נפש*, and you must not eat the *נפש* with the *בשר*" (Deut 12:23). Here a prohibition of mixing meat and blood connotes a prohibition of mixing symbols of life and death (Deut 12:21-25). Thus, it could also be further argued that this prohibition is an example of the OT avoidance of contrastive pairs, in this case, avoidance of the mixture of "living-blood" and "dead-meat". This argument purports to demonstrate the alimentary code regarding the drinking of milk and meat as an analogy of the blood with meat avoidance. The interpretation the Hebrew OT regulations against mixing of categories provokes the discussion of another physical and cultural anthropological dimension of the Israelite dietary system which stipulates that a kid must not be seethed in its mother's milk. (Exod 23:19; 34:26; Deut 14:21).

blood. I do not see the differing interpretation of blood rituals discussed in this thesis (protective or purificatory) as contradictory. They may rather be considered as complementary. However, beyond this, is my notion of “ultimate intention” of blood ritual - blood in ritual is meant to give life to a person because blood is life. In my opinion the ultimate purpose of a ritual is what is more important and this has to do with the preservation of life as evident in the case of the Passover blood ritual, and the restoration of life as present in the case of the *מצרע* blood ritual.<sup>7</sup>

The “life” of an individual can therefore be understood, among other things, in terms of the relationship between fluids and the body. It is in light of this that I propose, that “life-affirming” rituals such as sacrifices involving blood should be considered against the broader context of giving life to the offerer. When this is done, one will observe that the clause “the blood is the life of the flesh” (Lev 17:11, 14) takes on a wider significance than its particular reference to the altar-rites in the temple. The main rationale for putting blood on the altar is that it may be manipulated on behalf of the life of the offerer. That in the OT, the statement that “Blood is life” and “blood contains life” appears in the context of sacrifice indicates that sacrifice is all about life – evidence for blood having other functions is negligible. “Life” as a property of blood is fundamental to understanding the ritual significance of blood in the OT. We can understand why Leviticus claims that blood is life because blood is a major agent of vivification. References to other functions of blood such as “purgative” may be what it is believed to be because of “life in the fluid”. Blood sacrifice must therefore be understood in terms of giving of life and avoidance of death.

The application of blood to the altar is an attempt at, in some way, giving life. But the question is, giving life to what? Some scholars like Milgrom will argue that something happens to the altar when blood is applied to it – it is purged of impurity that has accumulated on it. It may even be suggested with my line of argument that the blood, which is animate, presumably gives life to the inanimate altar. In the case of the Passover, the doorpost is not purified and so must be the case that the altar is not purified in the cured *מצרע*’s ritual. Whichever way one handles the question of

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<sup>7</sup> The choice of the two rituals above is significant especially because they deal directly with the life of individual.

what happens to the altar, the thought of the purpose for which blood is manipulated whoever is ritually vivified ultimately must be considered more significant. The implication here is that blood is not purificatory in the context of its application to the body and the altar in the ritual of the cured ~~וַיִּשְׂחַק~~, the Passover sacrifice, and the application of blood of circumcision to Moses sick body. If it has a protective function at all, it is limited. וַיִּשְׂחַק

I do not strongly reject the plausibility of the various perspectives proposed by scholars. Each perspective deserves its fitting recognition. However, I have privileged the interpretation of the function of blood in OT rituals from the perspective of the life and death of an individual over the other scholarly interpretations of the function of blood in Israelite rituals.

## (2) Blood in Temple Sacrifice

This research does have some significance for an understanding of the role of blood in Temple sacrifice. How should we approach the question of the significance of blood in the OT? Studying blood via sacrifice is problematic. Milgrom proposes that blood has a cleansing, almost “detergent” effect, but the whole discussion can become embroiled in detailed disputes about כפר and its uses. There has been extensive discussion of כפר in the OT cultic texts.<sup>8</sup> Prominent among these is Milgrom who sees in כפר the meaning “purge”. Milgrom’s proposal has been that “the blood is the ritual detergent employed by the priest to purge the sanctuary of the impurities inflicted upon the altar by the offerer of the sacrifice”.<sup>9</sup> However, Maccoby observes that the verb כפר may mean either “to atone” or “to cleanse”, depending on the context.<sup>10</sup> Thus, there are divergent views as to what כפר actually means. The prepositions כפר takes are very important in this discussion.<sup>11</sup> For

<sup>8</sup> Some scholars have sought to explain כפר as “cover”, and “wipe off”. H. C. Brichto, ‘On Slaughter and Sacrifice, Blood and Atonement’, *HUCA* 47 (1976), pp. 19-55; B. Janowski, *Sühne*, pp. 1-26; N. Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature: Its Meaning and Function* (JSOTSup 56 Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), pp. 87-109.

<sup>9</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, p. 256.

<sup>10</sup> Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality*, p. 180.

<sup>11</sup> The interpretation of the prepositions –ל, –ב, על, where they go with כפר can be problematic.



example, Maccoby argues that the use of prepositions in Hebrew is too slippery to be made the basis of the argument that the sin offering does not atone for sin but acts as a “detergent” for the altar.<sup>12</sup> However, the problem here is whether the כפר is made “for” the altar itself or “upon” the altar for somebody or something else. The expression כפר על could carry connotations of covering or protection, even though the cover or veil may not be over or above the thing covered, but rather before it.<sup>13</sup> Presumably, the blood acted as a covering for the object of כפר, a person or a sacred item in the sanctuary. The implication in the verse is that YHWH has assigned the blood on the altar for them. The purpose of this assignment is to effect כפר for their lives (themselves). Here, it is very clear that what effects the כפר is the blood.

In Lev 17:11 the offence of eating blood is presented in contrast with the act of putting the blood upon the altar. Since the life-principle (נפש) of the flesh resides in the blood, God has ordained for his people that the blood (daubed) on the altar will serve to make כפר for their lives. This life-principle is the essential “ingredient” which credits the blood with vital power. It is possible that the subjects of כפר in this passage include God who has assigned the blood to the altar, the Israelite who

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Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature*, p. 96. As to the interpretation of the prefix -ל in לכפר in Lev 17:11, Kiuchi notes that, in that the purpose of the rite is in the consecration of the altar, the interpretation “in order to” is incorrect. Thus, Kiuchi sees כפר as the act by means of which the unclean becomes holy. See also ‘ב’ in HALOT, 103-105). If the ב is ב-instrumenti, then it suggests that the means of כפר is נפש contained in the blood. The question is, what does this נפש governed by the preposition –ב refer to in Lev 17:11? Janowski thinks the ב must be ב-instrumenti but the ב-essentiae is unlikely (Janowski, *Suhne*, pp. 245-246. According to Kiuchi, the ב-pretii is unlikely but thinks the ב-instrumenti is possible. Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature*, pp. 105-106. See also Levine, *In the Presence of the Lord*, pp. 67-68. Levine takes the ב to be ב-pretii. Brichito objects to the suggestion that the נפש governed by the preposition –ב refers to the specific life of the person “requiring redemption”, arguing that this element is already present in the verse in the plural of נפש governed by the preposition על-נפשתיכם: “for/on behalf of your lives”. Brichito, ‘On Slaughter and Sacrifice, Blood and Atonement’, pp. 19-55. See ‘על’, in BDB, 752-758; ‘על’, in HALOT 2.824-827; B. K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), pp. 216-218. Kiuchi has pointed out that when על is translated “for”, it is the “beneficiary” of the כפר that is being referred to. See Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature*, p. 91.

<sup>12</sup> Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality*, 178.

<sup>13</sup> ‘על’, BDB, 752-758; Waltke and O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, pp. 216-218

provides the animal source and the blood itself. The most obvious subject is the blood as that the main subject of discussion in the passage.

In Lev 17:11, the application of blood to the altar indicates clearly that what is meant here is blood sacrifice. However, our interest is not in the kind of sacrifice referred to in this passage, but rather the significance of blood in the sacrifice.<sup>14</sup>

The blood is assigned to the altar **לכפר על-נפשתיכם** (Lev 17:11). Milgrom notes that in this passage, the preposition **על** following the **כפר** means “on behalf of”, and therefore the **כפר**-rite is performed on behalf of the person offering the sacrifice.<sup>15</sup> According to him, the phrase **לכפר על-נפשתיכם** implies that human life is in jeopardy unless the stipulated ritual is carried out. For him **כפר** in this phrase means “ransom”.<sup>16</sup>

It appears that whatever the meaning of **כפר** on the altar may be, its ultimate goal is to bring life to the offerer and this is demonstrated in the ritual use of life-blood. Presumably, Lev 17:11 implies that the ultimate object of **כפר** is the offerer. If this is acceptable, then in agreement with Kiuchi as already noted above,<sup>17</sup> there is a sense in which the altar represents the offerer, and therefore what is done to the altar is indirectly done to the offerer. Perhaps the blood reanimates the altar on behalf of

<sup>14</sup> Milgrom rejects Blum's argument that Lev 17:11 deals with the need to bring a gift to God via the altar. E. Blum, *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990), pp. 324-25; Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, p. 1475. According to Milgrom, the passage does not concern itself with all sacrifices but he rather holds that sacrifice in Lev 17:11 fits the rationale of the **שלמים** (well-being offering). Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, p. 1473. See also Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, pp. 217-26, 704-13 and B. J. Schwartz, 'The Prohibition Concerning the "Eating" of Blood in Lev 17' in eds. G. A. Anderson and S. M. Olyan, *Priesthood and Cult in Ancient Israel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), pp. 34-66. See also Milgrom, 'A Prolegomenon to Lev 17.11', pp. 62-72, and idem, *Cultic Theology*, pp. 96-103. Milgrom thinks this Lev 17:11 must not be associated with the **חטאת** offering, the blood of which is indeed placed by the priest on the horns of the altar. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, p. 1473. He notes that the passage complements and completes the law in Lev 17:3-5. Milgrom explains that unlike the burnt offering, which in the main is a gift to deity, the blood in Lev 17:11 is that which YHWH gives to Israel and that it is not Israel that gives it to YHWH.

<sup>15</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, pp. 253-54, 704-13; Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, p. 1474.

<sup>16</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, p. 1474; Milgrom believes it is not the blood of all sacrifices but rather particularly, it is the blood of the **שלמים**, which serves as the ransom for the life of its offerer. He categorically states, with reference to Lev 17:11, that since the slaughter of the animal is murder (Lev 17:3-4), the blood ransoms the offerer's life and clears him of the charge of murder. See Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, pp. 1473-1474. See also Brichto, 'On Slaughter and Sacrifice, Blood and Atonement', pp. 19-55. Brichto also thinks one cannot rest content with "expiate" as a satisfactorily unambiguous rendering of the verb **כפר**. For him, "ransom" seems to be a better approximation as the theological overtones of "expiate" may obfuscate the Hebrew.

<sup>17</sup> Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature*, p. 162.

the offerer. This argument may be especially valid if the impurity on the altar renders the altar impotent or even “dead”.<sup>18</sup> For Kiuchi, the passage in Lev 17:11 is the key to the deeper dimension of the parallel between purification of the offerer and what takes place on the altar.<sup>19</sup> He argues that the passage assumes that the offerer is personally involved in the manipulation, and that perhaps, behind the relationship between the offerer and the sancta lies an idea that the sancta invariably represents the people.<sup>20</sup>

What is significant here is interpreting the basic function of the blood in relation to what blood itself is. Just as the rationale for the regulations on handling blood in Lev 17 is that it is life or contains life, so must we understand that the functions of blood in sacrificial rituals must be interpreted in terms of the life-giving or animating characteristics of blood. In other words, if that blood is life underlies the rationale for its application to the altar or other objects, then the life-giving property of fluids in the body must be taken into consideration when exploring the function(s) of blood in all blood rituals, including all sacrifices at the altar.

The way כִּפֹּר is expressed in Leviticus suggests blood is doing something else other than purification. Not that Milgrom is wrong, but the ambiguity of the sentences and the difficulty surrounding כִּפֹּר and the prepositions used with it suggests that even if Milgrom is right, there is ambiguity about the nature of the mechanism. Suppose Milgrom is right that putting blood on the altar in some way purges the altar, it does not explain how blood does that. There is no indication that blood is a detergent. Blood here is poured at the base of the altar, elsewhere on the horns. It is difficult to determine from Leviticus what the writers had in mind. The point here is that the way in which things are understood in Lev 17:11 and elsewhere in the OT texts on blood rituals lacks clarity. Milgrom's ideas have not gone unchallenged but those who have challenged his hypothesis have not been able to

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<sup>18</sup> Some scholars have related uncleanness to “death”. See G. J. Wenham, ‘Why Does Sexual Intercourse Defile (Lev 15:18)?’, ZAW 95 (1983), pp. 432-434; August Dillman, *Die Bücher Exodus und Leviticus*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Leipzig, S. Hirzel, 1880), p. 479; N. Füglistner, ‘Sühne durch Blut – Zur Bedeutung von Lev 17.11’, in *Studien zum Pentateuch* [FS, W. Kornfeld] ed., by G. Braulik; Wien/Freiburg/Basel (1977), pp. 143-64; Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature*, pp. 63-66.

<sup>19</sup> Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature*, p. 161.

<sup>20</sup> Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature*, p. 162.

convincingly solve the problem of what blood actually does on the altar. Therefore, an alternative approach to this must involve looking at the substance used in this ritual that is blood, and what the associations of this substance are. Thus, the nature of what brings about כפר is what must rather be of greater interest to us. In the context of our study this is the blood, a fluid inherent with life.

In spite of the fact that sacrificial blood rituals have been the locus of intense scholarly interest, and with reference to the function of blood on the sacred objects of the sanctuary in particular, a lively ground of debate, no full-scale treatment of the significance of blood in OT rituals against the backdrop of the Israelite/Jewish perspective of fluids and life has yet been undertaken. The present study is therefore an endeavour to fill this gap. This study therefore affirms strongly the Levitical idea that “blood is life”. Withdrawal of fluids from the body renders it lifeless – but blood can also, in certain contexts, restore life.

The present study constitutes a contribution to the discussion about the question of the life-giving function of blood in the OT, since there is no treatment available that concerns itself with fluids and life in Hebrew thought. What is presented in the study is a proposed way of understanding the life-giving function of blood in light of the fundamental role of fluids in the body as a life-giving substance.

The study is not limited to a particular point in time, but rather concerned with the Hebrew notions of death in relations to dryness, as well as blood rituals during the period of time that saw the growth and recognition of that compilation of the OT. The task of this study is to determine the place of fluids in relation to the life of a person according to Hebrew thinking throughout the OT period from the physiological and cultic contexts. The present study is a study in OT literature, and cultural anthropology.<sup>21</sup> The task will also entail explaining something of the blood-related regulations on Israelite social life.

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<sup>21</sup> Broadly speaking, anthropology is a discipline that studies humans and human culture. See Charles E. Carter, ‘A Discipline in Transition: The Contributions of the Social Sciences to the Study of the Hebrew Bible’, in C. E. Carter and C. L. Meyers eds., *Community, Identity and Ideology: Social Science Approaches to the Hebrew Bible* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1996), pp. 3-36. The two main branches of anthropology are, (i) physical anthropology, which studies human origins and development from our earliest hominid ancestors to modernity, and (ii) cultural anthropology, which is the study of various aspects of human culture. For a further discussion on this see John W. Rogerson, *Anthropology and the Old Testament* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1978), pp. 9-10. Rogerson observes that while Americans prefer the nomenclature “cultural anthropology”, British anthropologists prefer to

The idea of dryness in relation to death makes fluids a significant representation of life and therefore merits critical attention. In the discussion of death beliefs and practices, where the OT is limited in sources, I have turned to archaeology for input, because to comprehend the people's concept of life in relation to fluids, the OT may not tell it all, as certain popular practices may not have been documented in the literature of the ancient Hebrews. It is the understanding of the role of fluids in relation to the physical life that informs the role of blood in animal sacrifice in Israelite cult. The question about the place of blood in Israelite cultus focuses on blood rituals in Exodus and Leviticus that have to do with the protection or restoration of physical life. To comprehend OT blood ritual as a means towards maintaining the physical life of a people (not only social life but physiological life), what will be needed is a new reconstruction of the Hebrew concept of life and death in terms of physiological and ritual significance of body fluids.

In this thesis I have proposed a different approach, which first looks at the physiological understanding of blood expressed in literature and burial practices, before turning to examine its role in blood rituals. Sacrifice is where blood is a problem, but rather than discussing sacrifice, I have looked at blood elsewhere and try to construct a broader picture of the Israelite way of thinking about blood. What literally did the Israelites believe blood to be? What to them was the significance of blood at the ritual level? Here physiology and anthropology come in. In my approach to analysing the Hebrew concept of blood as life-giving in sacrifice and other rituals, the Hebrew concept of moisture and life becomes very significant. I have adopted an approach in which the data deriving from the OT text, archaeology, anthropology and analogies from other cultures have been used in explaining life and death in terms of fluids.<sup>22</sup>

In view of the foregoing discussion, an important suggestion arises: when scholars come to assess the ancient Hebrew concepts of life and death as well as Israelite/Judahite burial customs, they need to bear in mind the strong identification of

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speak of "social anthropology". Fundamental components of cultural anthropology include such disciplines as archaeology, linguistics and ethnology.

<sup>22</sup> Various sections of chapters draw on the works of anthropologists, especially, A. van Gennep and V. Turner's concept of liminality as the organizing principle of ritual action.

fluids as life-giving, a point that underpins burial rituals and a view apparently shared with the ancient world of Egypt and that of Homer. The ultimate purpose for every blood ritual is to manipulate this life-bearing fluid in order to give life and that is what blood does – it gives life. Even though the argument for the idea of blood being a ritual purgative or protective may be strong, these functions will always remain secondary to the fundamental role of blood in sacrifice and other rituals being the giving of life.

Overall, the material of this study reveals an Israelite concept that demonstrates that “dryness” represents “death” and shows the significance of the Israelite/Judahite concept of fluids giving life, from the understanding of Israelite customs and practices relating to giving life and burying the dead. That “Blood is life” or “there is life in blood” is a very ordinary statement that corresponds entirely to normal physiological understanding as depicted in OT literature and Judahite burial rites. The presence of blood can be efficacious in certain respects and that stems from the understanding that it is necessary for living. OT ritual uses of blood suggest that it can protect and give life and health. It is valuable for revivifying dead parts of the body. In relation to the blood ritual, one can also say that just as the “living dead” in the form of shades in the afterlife presumably survive on fluids, so do the “dead living” like the *מצרע* ritually survive by ritual transmission of blood. However, the shades remain dead and their revivification with blood does not return them to full life, but rather make them less dead so to speak, as illustrated by the Homeric idea already discussed above with regard to the revivification of the dead with blood.

Again, this study shows that, in Hebrew thinking, it takes time to die as indicated by the slow process of decay and death brought to an end in dryness of the bones. In contrast with this, the return to life can also be a slow process as indicated by the time taken for the ritual of restoration of the *מרצע* to be completed. However, in the ritual slaughtering of sacrificial animals, the process of death is sped up, resulting the division between the flesh and the blood. This may be necessary because in the context of sacrifice, blood is needed on the altar because it is life, but the flesh or carcass is dead and therefore could either be eaten or burnt as a sacrifice to God. The fact that the carcass of the animal may be eaten but the blood may not be,

can be explained as follows: That which is life cannot be eaten; the living thing must die before it can be eaten. Blood cannot die, it remains alive after it has come out of the body; but the flesh of an animal can be eaten only when it is completely dead, that is, when its life, in the form of blood, has been removed from it.

If we take blood to be about life, then the pouring of blood on the altar in the light of OT ideas has to do with the giving of life and taking of life. In other words, if it is the application of blood that seems to make כפר, then the כפר itself presumably involves the giving of life. Nothing we have looked at points to blood as a cleansing agent. Therefore, it cannot be a starting point for the investigation of sacrifice that blood is a cleansing agent even for the altar. Even in the case of the מצרע, the use of blood is in terms of the association of blood with life. Consequently, if Milgrom and others want to place the use of blood central in the conceptualization of sacrifice as purificatory, they have to find some other way of explaining blood. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss this, that is, to construct a whole analysis of sacrifice based on my study. But this thesis offers a new basis for future study on sacrifice. It is also hoped that this study will open up a new discussion in the area of OT anthropology of the body fluids.

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- KJV King James Version
- LXX *Septuaginta*, A. Rahlfs (ed.) (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979).
- NIV New International Version
- RSV Revised Standard Version (English)

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